

GENDERING THE NORDIC PAST

WOMEN OF THE PAST
TESTIMONIES FROM ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORY

VOLUME 4

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Gendering the Nordic Past

Dialogues between Perspectives

Edited by

UNN PEDERSEN,
MARIANNE MOEN, AND
LISBETH SKOGSTRAND

BREPOLS

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

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D/2025/0095/59

ISBN 978-2-503-60887-7

E-ISBN 978-2-503-60888-4

DOI 10.1484/M.WOP-EB.5.135552

Printed in the EU on acid-free paper

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Introduction

1. Gendering the Nordic Past

Dialogues between Perspectives

This book presents the results of the inter-Nordic and interdisciplinary research project *Gendering the Nordic Past* (2021–2023), funded by UiO:Nordic.¹ With the aim of (re)evaluating and revitalizing the field of gender studies of the Nordic past, the project has worked across disciplines invested in the study and representation of the human past. Anchored in archaeology and with partners in history, critical heritage studies, art history, theology, and gender studies, the project network has collaborated across disciplinary boundaries to produce timely and valuable insights into how the past and present coexist in a continuous loop of feedback and influence.

By tackling a wide range of topics, ranging from the Stone Age and into the early modern period, the anthology presents novel perspectives on how gender in the past is created in the present. Most chapters use Nordic case studies, but we also include significant contributions from Nordic scholars exploring the past in other regions. In this way, we offer a multifaceted view of how current Nordic scholarship on the past theorizes gender. Together, the contributions provide a comprehensive dialogue with the ways in which gender has influenced our perspectives on the past, as well as how seeking to understand gender can further nuance our interpretations of past identities.

Contextualizing the Book: Gender Matters in Present and Past

The project background is inextricably linked with growing societal concerns about the success of the feminist movement of the previous century, together with an increased focus on questions of diversity. Recent years have seen hallmark events such as MeToo and TimesUp put a spotlight on how sexism is still entrenched in Western society, together with a growing awareness of the discriminatory nature of many cultural customs. In light of this, we have found it both timely and topical to take a scholarly look at the current state of awareness of gender and diversity in scholarly traditions related to the Nordic past. How we envisage the past, disseminate it, and represent it are significant concerns, because the past forms a backdrop against which current social norms are configured.

Framing a Paradox: Gender Equality and the Nordic Model

The ‘Nordic model’ is a term attached to many different aspects considered fundamental to the construction of Nordic societies.² The connotations are usually positive, denominating enviable models of equality, welfare, and fair dealing. When it comes to gender

¹ UiO:Nordic 2023.

² See Blomquist and Moene 2015, and articles in the same special issue on the Nordic model.

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equality, the Nordic model is commonly descriptive of progress: the Nordic countries rank highly in gender equality indexes. According to the Nordic Council and Nordic Council of Ministers: 'The Nordic countries have worked together for over four decades to improve gender equality in all aspects of society. Gender equality between the sexes is a condition for the success of the Nordic Model and a pillar of the modern Nordic welfare states.'³ The idea of the Nordic nations as champions of gender equality is engrained in the collective identity of the region and gives our project its background and topicality. Thus, the historicity of the Nordic model of gender equality deserves investigation, both from the perspective of how it figures in the common perception of the past, but also how it influences representations and academic interpretations of it. Addressing tensions between past and present, *Gendering the Nordic Past* scrutinizes the relationship on the one hand, between the Nordic model of gender equality and the legacy of historical myths as origin stories, and on the other, between studies of gender in the Nordic past and a present collective memory of gender equality. Bringing together the critical perspectives of gender studies (addressing portrayals of gender and identity) and critical heritage studies (addressing the portrayal and use of the past in the present) this book highlights the evidential paradox between pervasive myths of an egalitarian Nordic past and an endemic androcentric bias in research traditions studying the Nordic past.

Continuing a Scholarly Tradition

Concerns for how gender impacts representations of the past are by no means a new concept. The Nordic countries were at the forefront of the early developments, contributing a workshop held in 1979 titled *Were They All Men?*,⁴ several significant research outputs,⁵ a dedicated archaeological journal, *K.A.N. Kvinner i arkeologi i Norge* (*Women in Archaeology in Norway*),⁶ and an academic journal dedicated to gender theory, *Tidsskrift for genusvetenskap* (*Journal of Gender Science*). The international breakthrough came in 1984 with the seminal paper 'Archaeology and the Study of Gender' by Margaret Conkey and Janet Spector.⁷ The explicit goal of their work was to challenge the implicit transference

of assumptions of sexual stereotypes and gendered divisions of labour influenced by twentieth-century norms and ideologies onto the past. Such attitudes were epitomized by the 'Man the Hunter theory', which posited men as active drivers of human development and progress, leaving women as passive sexual vessels.⁸ It is a pertinent point that whilst academia purports to have left this particular theory behind, it remains influential in popular culture,⁹ and arguably also in academic narratives.¹⁰ In the wake of Conkey and Spector's paper, gender archaeology became a growing subdiscipline, seeking, in its earliest incarnations, to redress the lack of women in representations of the past. Using the momentum from feminist engagement across the humanities and sciences,¹¹ the 1980s and 1990s saw considerable advances made in Nordic as well as international research. The result was important and high-impact studies demonstrating the implicit androcentrism of much earlier and contemporary research, highlighting moreover how interpretations of empirical data were tailored to suit ideas of propriety and appropriate sexual behaviour, glossing over queerness in favour of heteronormative explanations.¹² Following the 1990s' theoretical concern with plurality, and an implicit distancing from explicit feminist agendas,¹³ the early 2000s saw a lull in theoretical engagement with subjects of gender. In turn, the last decade has seen a renewed interest in gender and identity among Nordic researchers,¹⁴ and some intense debates following high-impact results.¹⁵ This new trend in research has been characterized by highly varied approaches, spanning from feminist perspectives and explicitly theoretical explorations to archaeometric explorations of aDNA and isotope studies, as will be evident from the following chapters. Evident in emerging research is a wide diversity in approaches to gender and sex, including studies that highlight the roles of women, those that explore how gender can be perceived in various forms of data, to

³ Norden 2020.

⁴ Published later as Bertelsen and others 1987, and with a manuscript circulating in between when publication was delayed due to constraints in academia.

⁵ e.g., Gejvall 1970; Næss 1974; Sogner and Eliassen 1981; Dommasnes 1982; Steinsland 1985; Sørensen 1988; Arwill-Nordbladh 1989.

⁶ See Dommasnes 1992, 7–8; Skogstrand 2023.

⁷ Conkey and Spector 1984.

⁸ Lee and DeVore 1968.

⁹ Maynes and Waltner 2012, 73.

¹⁰ Anderson and others 2023.

¹¹ Harding 1986; Connell 1987; Butler 1990; Jordanova 1993.

¹² e.g., Dommasnes 1982; 1998 [1991]; Engelstad 1991; Gero 1991; Hjørungdal 1991; Wylie 1991; Sørensen 1992; Gifford-Gonzales 1993; Engelstad and others 1994; Mundal 1994; Arwill-Nordbladh 1998; Solli 1999; 2002.

¹³ Moi 2006; Wylie 2007; see also discussions in Fuglestad 2014; Moen 2019a, 43–44; 2019b.

¹⁴ e.g., Bergerbrant 2007; Danielsson 2007; Engelstad 2007; Pedersen 2008; Moen 2011; Fredriksen 2010; 2012; Fuglestad 2014; Melheim 2015; Skogstrand 2016; Halldórsdóttir 2019; Furholt 2019; Felding 2020; Felding and others 2020; Østmo 2020; Røstad 2021.

¹⁵ Hedenstierna-Jonson and others 2017; Price and others 2019 with references; Frieman and Hofmann 2019 with references; Furholt 2021.

Table 1.1. Timeline defining the different periods in the Nordic prehistory and early history, based on the most commonly used Norwegian terminology.

Mesolithic 9500–4000 BC		Neolithic 4000–1700 BC	Bronze Age 1700–500 BC		Early Iron Age 500 BC–AD 550			Late Iron Age AD 550–1050		The Middle Ages AD 1050–1500		Early modern period
Early	Middle–Late	Early–Middle–Late	Early	Late	Pre-Roman	Roman period	Migration period	Merovingian period	Viking period	Early	Late	
9500–8000	8000–4000	4000–1700	1700–1100	1100–500	500–1	1–400	400–550	550–800	800–1050	1050–1350	1350–1500	1500–1800

studies that critically examine the concepts of gender and sex. All of these different angles can be found in the following book.

This anthology continues a long and rich tradition of assembling research on gender into one volume — with brilliant examples including *Women Culture and Society*,¹⁶ *Engendering Archaeology*,¹⁷ *The Archaeology of Gender*,¹⁸ *Reader in Gender Archaeology*,¹⁹ *To Tender Gender*,²⁰ *A Companion to Gender Prehistory*,²¹ and *Women in Archaeology*.²²

Revealing Gender Dynamics in the Nordic Past — and Present Stereotypes

Most papers in this anthology draw upon material from the Nordic region (Fig. 1.1), while ancient Egypt, Iron Age Athens, and Neolithic Europe are represented to add perspectives, and provide a wider view on Nordic scholars engagement with gender (contributions by Furholt and Burmeister; Handberg; Skumsnes). Several authors also demonstrate how developments in the Nordic area tie in with wider European trends (in particular Bø; Røstad). Otherwise, the geographical scope of the papers varies from the site-specific, via regions, to larger areas in terms of case studies. The empirical data the authors draw upon ranges from an object, via a single burial, cemeteries, and remains from a technology to settlement structures and/or a number of written sources. Encompassing a wide temporal range, the book explores Nordic periods from the Stone Age (the Early Mesolithic) to early modern times (Table 1.1), with these contributions organized chronologically, and those which add further perspectives in a final section. As a result of the chronological order the contributions

in the two first sections are from archaeology while the two last sections also have authors from other disciplines. Numerous topics link the papers together, and we present some of what we see as shared themes and trends below.

Throughout the two-year period that the project lasted, the authors have presented their work at various stages, ranging from initial ideas to drafts and completed papers. The initial invitation to the project participants was quite open, allowing authors the freedom to choose their perspectives and questions. As a result, the anthology has evolved into a diverse collection of approaches. Acknowledging that engagement with the past inspires reflection on gender from highly varied points of view, the project invited both scholars from the field(s) of gender studies and scholars from other fields that in various ways and to various extents have touched upon gender in earlier or ongoing research. Some of the contributions have empirical observations as their point of departure; others have theoretical perspectives at their root. While some of the works explicitly draw upon feminist theory and critical perspectives and discuss the significance of gendered categories as analytical concepts, others delve into gender through material and/or textual case studies. Along the way, the authors have drawn inspiration from one another, engaged in discussions on common questions, theories, and approaches, and gained insights from each other's perspectives. Participants working within widely different contexts and times have brought up topics independently, stimulating fruitful discussion and exchange of insights from otherwise separate fields of study. Consequently, chapters interconnect through shared inquiries, perspectives, theories, and materials, leading to the emergence of certain distinct trends that permeate the book, as will be returned to in more detail. These trends might be said to characterize the current state of studies of gender in the past. While interconnected, the contributions are not streamlined or uniform,²³ and contradictory views of gender are to be

¹⁶ Rosaldo and Lamphere 1974.

¹⁷ Gero and Conkey 1991.

¹⁸ Willows and Walde 1991.

¹⁹ Hays-Gilpin and Whitley 1998.

²⁰ Danielsson and Thedeén 2012.

²¹ Bolger 2013.

²² Varela 2023.

²³ Something we find appropriate within a field regarding knowledge as situated, see Haraway 1988.



Figure 1.1. The geographic locations of Nordic sites explored in the book, also with present-day countries, boundaries, and capitals. The Nordic area includes present-day Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, and Iceland (and also the Faroe Islands, Greenland, and the Åland Islands, not touched upon here). The first three constitute Scandinavia, while the Scandinavian peninsula equals the first two, and Fennoscandia includes the Scandinavian and Kola peninsula, Mainland Finland, and Karelia. Map by Weronika Patrycja Polańska and Lisbeth Skogstrand.

found in the subsequent chapters, hopefully stimulating reflections and continued discussion. A further note is that although the volume aims to provide a wide array of case studies and chapters covering different chronological periods and approaches, we can make no claim to providing a comprehensive overview of the Nordic past, or even a balanced presentation of the long timespan. For instance, many of the chapters deal with the Late Iron Age. To some extent, this reflects current emphasis in academic discourse, but first and foremost it is a consequence of a project initially conceived by two Viking Age scholars, although experts in other fields (notably Mesolithic and critical heritage studies) contributed vital input from the first stages of project development. From this starting point, we sought to widen our outlook, inviting scholars with different areas of expertise from our own. We strove to make this a network of scholars with a shared interest in gender in the past rather than one focused on gender in a given time frame. Though the Late Iron Age is the chronological period that is best covered here, we believe the chapters all offer more universally applicable considerations, extending well outside the given empirical basis on which they are made. Through extensive referencing of existing scholarship, the individual chapters also provide a gateway to in-depth studies within their respective fields. In this way, we present a volume that speaks to how we can better gender the Nordic past in many varied ways, working to a common goal.

The volume constitutes a contribution to the wider trend of rejuvenating academic interest in questions of past gender and identity. It has been produced in tandem with *The Routledge Handbook of Gender Archaeology*,²⁴ and both publication projects have benefited from different geographical and disciplinary focuses. We hope both volumes will provide inspiration for practitioners seeking alternative ways of integrating gender into studies of the past and shine a light on the interplay of the present and interpretations of past identities.

Household and Knowledge Transmission

The reader will find problems brought up that span the range of periods in the book. It is especially thought provoking that family structures and households are addressed both in the first paper on the Stone Age, right after the end of the last glaciation in the Nordic region (Fuglestad), and in a paper on the early modern period (Sandvik), with salient points brought up in both. The ten thousand years that separate them illuminates the book's broad time frame. The two papers illustrate that gender can be explored from widely different

past remains, respectively manufacturing waste left behind at settlement sites and detailed information from written sources on the inhabitants at a farm. Nevertheless, both papers highlight that settlement structures reveal family dynamics, and argue that the socialization of children and youths was a task shared by women and men. The anthropologically informed study of the Stone Age suggests that the observed long-term stability might be related to a family structure which facilitated successful socialization processes and knowledge transmission across generations, where both men and women spent a substantial amount of time with children, teaching them various skills, including technological ones (Fuglestad). The study on the early modern period argues that the gendered division of labour was a driving force behind economic growth and discusses the care, upbringing, and socialization of children and youths with men and women taking part in the process (Sandvik).

Still Challenging Androcentrism

A point that deserves reflection is that throughout this book, the authors confront androcentric interpretations, challenge male–female stereotypes, and highlight the absence of women in narratives of the past. Despite forty years of feminist critique targeting androcentrism in science, interpretations pertaining to men's power, roles, and economic significance are still taken for granted, produced by and reproducing stereotypes. Men are still often portrayed as the primary agents around whom societies evolve, while women are still overlooked, reduced to symbols of men's status, or considered and described from a male perspective and only insofar as their roles are relevant for assumed male experiences.

Several papers shed light on and confront the presence of double standards in scholarly interpretations, particularly evident in how textile work by nuns in medieval monasteries has stood in the shadow of the manuscript production of monks (Kristjánsson), how women have been assigned a static ethnic identity as opposed to a flexible one assigned to warriors (Røstad), and how men in richly equipped graves are regarded as political figures, as opposed to women in strikingly similar graves (Pedersen). Collection biases, interpretative traditions, and established vocabulary are powerful, and misrepresentations linger even though they were pinpointed by feminist scholars decades ago. The entrenched nature of traditional narratives is so influential that even new evidence fails to alter them. To the contrary, some authors demonstrate how novel forms of data, such as aDNA and strontium isotopes have been presented as unquestionable evidence that merely reinforces existing narratives, without critical evaluation of whether these findings genuinely align with

²⁴ Moen and Pedersen 2025.

the proposed explanations (Furholt and Burmeister; Melheim). The strength of established narratives is also highlighted in a study of Migration-period gold, predominantly seen as an indicator of wealth and linked to men in leadership roles, whilst in reality it is most frequently found in women's graves. The author demonstrates how this empirical fact is overlooked in narratives on power dynamics, along with insights on elite women's agency developed by female archaeologists (Amundsen). This emphasis on the ongoing invisibility of women in scientific discourse, or science in general,²⁵ is reminiscent of the feminist critique that emerged during the early stages of gender research in the 1970s and 1980s. The studies here demonstrate how paying attention to women can profoundly transform our understanding of social processes, dynamics, and developments in past societies. Such approaches can create a broader understanding of social structures, including major institutions such as the medieval church (Kristjánsdóttir), marriage (Handberg), and families (Fuglestad; Sandvik), establish women as rulers (Pedersen) and actively involved in tactical diplomatic strategies (Skogstrand). It is demonstrated here that reassessment of women's activities, in particular textile work, is a key to understanding both their societal role and past societies better. By acknowledging in the present that the production of ecclesiastical cloths and tapestries was as paramount to the medieval church as the making of manuscripts (Kristjánsdóttir) and that embroidery served as an important means of self-expression and empowerment for women (Bø), we are able to present a past more in line with how it was lived. All in all, the contributions provide substantial evidence that some research areas still lack gender sensitivity, emphasizing the crucial role of gendered approaches in continuously questioning entrenched androcentric narratives, and other stereotypes.

Beyond Binary — Bodies, Categories, and Identities

This collection also serves as a reflection of the existing tension within current gender research, presenting papers that brings women to the fore along with those that advocate for a more fluid understanding of gender, sexuality, and identity. This echoes and in a way mirrors tensions in contemporary society, where there is an ongoing need to highlight continuing gendered inequalities kept in place by entrenched sexism, whilst counterbalanced with an increasing flexibility on gender as non-binary. It is accentuated here that gender should be viewed as a process of 'becoming' rather than a static

state of 'being', emphasizing its continuous production and reproduction (Aslesen). Gender as multifaceted and something that cannot be adequately contained by a focus on male and female bodies is brought up in several papers, through empirical examples and theoretically informed discussions (Aslesen; Croix; Moen; Skumsnes; Wessman, Frog, and Hedenstierna-Jonson). Two papers query why gender remains a key classification device for studying cemeteries when in fact so many graves fall outside the traditional tools for such categorization (Croix; Moen), whilst others query how we deal with the deviant, which does not fit into easy binary divisions of gendered bodies or categories (Aslesen; Spangen; Wessman, Frog, and Hedenstierna-Jonson). It is demonstrated that gendered identity was not a prominent feature in the mortuary representations of certain Viking-period cemeteries, but rather that burial practices were fluid and more indicative of social ties (Croix). It is also argued that the projection of Eurocentric perceptions of embodied gender onto the past creates a false perception of neatly contained binary gender, even when the archaeological material speaks to a more complex and nuanced reading of social identities (Moen). Others discuss how meanings and associations of cultural signs may change when objects are transferred between different cultures and contexts, potentially negotiating different genders and cultural affiliations (Spangen; Wessman, Frog, and Hedenstierna-Jonson). It is argued that Iron Age burials might reflect transformations in the gender system, shifting in a particular case from 'an enacted mode of expression of bodies to a hegemonic, embodied binary' (Aslesen). Based on the portrayal of gender in ancient Egyptian papyri it is also highlighted that comprehending gender in the past requires recognition of the multifaceted relations involved in the ongoing processes of shaping and conceptualizing historical bodies, and how they are entangled in mutually determining relations that form affective environments (Skumsnes).

Intersectional Perspectives

Gender alone is rarely a meaningful category: it gains its social coding from how it intersects with race, age, class, and other fluid understandings of personhood. The discussions here unfold on two levels, one regarding the understanding of gender in prehistoric times, and the other concerning the researcher's ability to identify gendered categories. How do we acknowledge the unknown and ungendered, beyond the traditional markers like swords, jewellery, and bodily characteristics? The authors propose different methods, including statistical modelling and various interpretative frameworks to navigate this unfamiliar terrain, exploring historical

25 See e.g., Wylie 1991; 1997.

bodies (Skumsnes), dividual personhood (Croix), assemblages (Aslesen), and hybridization (Wessman, Frog, and Hedenstierna-Jonson). These frameworks strive to transcend and challenge the assumption of gender binarity, fostering a more inclusive understanding of gender dynamics. Taken as a whole, the collection reaches its conclusion by placing a strong emphasis on the profound significance of integrating diverse archaeologies, recognizing that the production of knowledge does not benefit from dichotomous thinking or reliance on stereotypical categories at any level.

The necessity of better integrating Saami, Nordic, and feminist gender archaeology is highlighted in one of the papers, demonstrating to what a limited extent Saami archaeology has been explored from gender and feminist perspectives (Spangen). Despite similar discussions on the complexity of identities, an emphasis on theory within both research fields, and even anchoring in the same academic institution there has been limited cross-fertilization and the author calls for joint efforts. Applying intersectional perspectives shows how (gendered) identity should not be anchored in simplistic understandings of bodily constraints: indeed, this can be used to juxtapose the constraints and limitations which have been naturalized in recent historical times in Eurocentric understandings. Intersectional perspectives are also useful when rethinking empirical material 'entrapped' in old interpretations, like dress-accessories of the Migration period, here revealed to play an important role in the display of ethnic, cultural, and social identities and functioning as a coded sensory system of non-verbal communication through which different dimensions of composite identities were generated, articulated, and transformed (Røstad). In similar ways, we can go beyond culturally entrenched understandings of social structures, and in this way approach new ways of seeing that are less locked in by established cultural expectations.

Questioning Stereotype Narratives of Marriage, Kinship, and Mobility

Continuing to challenge stereotypes, several chapters demonstrate that we cannot take for granted how kinship was constituted, or how it structured power dynamics, and shaped identity. Similarly, we cannot assume we know how marriages were arranged, their significance, or the restrictions on who could marry whom. Instead, marriages are proposed as strategic actions embedded within cultural, social, and ideological frameworks and need to be investigated within their historical context. As an institution, marriage can serve as a means to connect families, establish kinship ties, regulate sexuality and reproduction, and is thus often inherently intertwined with gender dynamics.

Further, the objectification of women often implicit in discussions of marriage alliances is challenged and the gendered nature of marriage as a diplomatic strategy in Roman-period Scandinavia is explored, arguing that women were actively engaged in these processes (Skogstrand). The need to investigate marriage within historical contexts and ideological frameworks is further underlined by a study of Early Iron Age Athens (1050–700 BC) (Handberg). Combining material culture and written sources the author identifies two distinct ideological conceptions of women's social status during this period, one characterized by reciprocity and equality, then replaced by the other revolving around the construction of the chaste maiden and patriarchal control.

Marriage often necessitates the mobility of one or both parts, but neither patrilocality nor patrilineality are universal conditions. A critical view on migration narratives of the Late Stone Age and Early Bronze Age exposes how new aDNA evidence is applied to confirm old narratives and stereotypes on men's progress and women's passivity, without considering the archaeological context or acknowledging the complexity of gene variation and changes (Furholt and Burmeister). They call for anthropologically informed research that opens up new views on the past. The call is answered by a paper challenging the idea of patrilineal descent and female exogamy that still thrives in Nordic Bronze Age research even after the arrival of new data (Melheim). It is argued that an equal number of men and women being buried in grave mounds, together with a higher number of prominent graves for women, speak in favour of two-sided exogamy, more in line with a varied mobility pattern. These contributions demonstrate that data derived from analyses of aDNA or isotopes are unable to challenge stereotype narratives of gender without the critical perspectives and gender sensitivity essential in any study of the past.

Engendering the Past

Throughout the history of gendering the past, scholars have consistently called for a revitalization of gendered approaches. The studies presented in this collection aim to rejuvenate research and point out several future trajectories. Moreover, they demonstrate that a significant aspect of gender research lies in the ongoing interrogation and contestation of gender-related stereotypes. Recognizing the profound interplay between the past and the present, it becomes evident that our interpretations of (pre-)history profoundly shape our contemporary self-perception. Hence, a critical approach to the past is imperative in debunking stereotype narratives concerning gender in the present. When past women are depicted

as being less significant, economically inferior, and less powerful than men, the prevailing notions of women's status today are perpetuated. By presenting gender as binary by default, we naturalize and legitimize the belief in this strict dichotomy in our contemporary society. By transferring what we today perceive as bodily realities onto the past and seeking to understand past lives through this, we risk overlooking that bodily realities are culturally coded and therefore not universal. A body in and of itself carries no universal meaning but is instead shaped by the social realities within which it exists. The past is a strong argument in our collective consciousness. Accordingly, it is essential to be aware of prejudices and to continue to present knowledge-based narratives to counteract conscious and unconscious misrepresentations. Furthermore, to stimulate diverse knowledge-based approaches to gender to underline that there is no such thing as a once and for all set past. Numerous topics, big and small, await further studies, as highlighted in the contributions to this book.

A Note on the Project *Gendering the Nordic Past*

Gendering the Nordic Past was a modestly funded research project, where we followed a model of reciprocity and shared research interest to create a lasting network of academic trust and growth. Our project members include both early career and established researchers, creating fertile ground for cross-pollination of ideas. We structured our work around a series of workshops, at which project participants shared and discussed drafts and ideas for chapters, culminating in this edited volume. This was made possible by additional generous funds from the Nordic university hub ReNEW.²⁶ The process has been a journey of confidence and bravery. We are grateful to the participants who had the patience to endure digital meetups during the pandemic and the courage to share their incomplete ideas and unfinished arguments, and who participated in respectful and constructive discussions — in person as well as in digital outbreak rooms. To be part of UiO:Nordic, a large-scale research initiative on the

Nordic region at the University of Oslo, has provided us with inspiring and valuable research input from a even wider interdisciplinary group of scholars. We are indebted to the invited guests at the workshops, sharing knowledge and providing valuable input on ideas and preliminary results. The works of Elisabeth Arwill-Nordbladh, Tove Hjørungdal, and Brit Solli have been a huge inspiration for years, and to have their feedback and their insights on the project has been an honour. Likewise, the project has been enriched by knowledge and thinking developed by a new generation of researchers: master's students (at that time) Weronika Patrycja Polańska and Amanda Josefine Pedersen, University of Oslo; PhD fellows (at that time) Louise Felding and Laura Elisabeth Bjørnevad-Ahlqvist, Aarhus University; Saga Rosenstrøm, University of Helsinki; Barbora Ziackova, Oxford University; Cassidy Lee Croci, University of Nottingham; and Aukse Beatrice Katarskyte, University of Oslo. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and providing comments on ours, we certainly look forward to your future contributions to the field.

The *Gendering the Nordic Past* conference at the University of Oslo in April 2023, arranged shortly before this book was submitted, certainly gave us high hopes for the future. Students from various disciplines engaged actively in formal and informal discussions, illustrating that engendering the past is also situating the past. We are especially indebted to our student helpers from the University of Oslo; Enya Karki Knutsen, Meri Sorter, Rebecca Bendiksen Johansen, and Sunniva Veum-Søhoel, and the three newly graduated scientific assistants that have made such an impact on the projects, in order of appearance Elisabeth Aslesen, Weronika Patrycja Polańska, and Solveig Isaksen. The students and young scholars brought novel thinking and demonstrated that upcoming generations of researchers are highly conscious of their gender vocabulary, and will continue to challenge and develop the field far beyond the current state-of-art. Inspired by their engagement we decided that although UiO:Nordic has come to an end, the *Gendering the Nordic Past Network* still has a role to play in the years to come: to gender the Nordic past is a never-ending project.

²⁶ ReNEW 2024.

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The Nordic Stone Age, Bronze Age, and Early Iron Age

2. Settlement, Technology, and Transmission of Knowledge

Early Mesolithic Family Structure as a Key to Understanding Long-Term Social Stability and Non-change

After the last glaciation, around 9700/9600 BC (cal BC), the retreating Scandinavian ice sheet opened up the possibility for human groups to enter unknown territories in the north. The Early Postglacial corresponds with the pioneer phase of central and northern Scandinavia and the Early Mesolithic of Norway, and is defined to the period 9500–8000 cal BC. The first pioneers entered eastern Norway via western Sweden and a continued colonization of the entire Norwegian coast took place within a relatively short time of two to three hundred years. Despite a total lack of boat fragments from this era, it is established with certainty that the settlement and mobility of these pioneers was intimately associated with seafaring craft,¹ probably something similar to umiaks.² Sites from this period do not show traces of long occupational phases, thus the duration of each stay was probably only a few days.³

There are currently over eight hundred known (excavated or surveyed) early Mesolithic sites in Norway.⁴ Most sites of this corpus are located in what was then the outer archipelago and ‘orientated towards an extreme marine environment, that is, to open seas’.⁵ Still, this coastline of islands, islets, sounds, and fjords offered opportunities for safe seafaring, as well as

‘ample numbers of natural harbours that secure[d] the connection between land and sea.’⁶ These shore-bound early Mesolithic sites are known as short-term occupation units, consisting of activity areas of *in situ* stone tool production, often accompanied by fireplaces, and other structures. Studies of the lithics show a directedness towards the manufacture of projectile points and the production of blades. During the Early Mesolithic, flint was the preferred raw material. Flint was either brought in from southern Scandinavia, or ice-transported nodules were procured at local beaches. Decreasing sizes of blanks left at the settlement sites,⁷ testify to a degree of scarcity of this raw material through the pioneer phase; this is accompanied by occasional use of non-flint local raw materials.

Despite these restrictions accessing sources of optimal raw material, the method of blade production was still one of Continental-European origin. Thus, the pioneer groups of Norway continued a late upper Palaeolithic and early Mesolithic legacy. Entering the barren landscapes of the north, the pioneers brought with them a given blade production concept, known as the soft direct percussion technique (see below). In the Norwegian landscapes, this tradition endured for another thousand years, or more. It continued until the transition to the Middle Mesolithic, a point in time at which a completely different production method appeared on the scene; the conical core pressure blade concept.⁸

¹ e.g., Bjerck 2009; 2017.

² Gjerde 2021.

³ Minor parts of the text in this chapter, i.e., the parts related to the early Holocene environmental context, also appears in this author’s contribution ‘The Pioneer Experience’ in Stutz and others 2025.

⁴ Breivik 2014, fig. 3.

⁵ Svendsen 2018, 357.

⁶ Bjerck 2008d, 85.

⁷ Jakslund and Fossum 2014.

⁸ Sørensen and others 2013; Damlien 2016.

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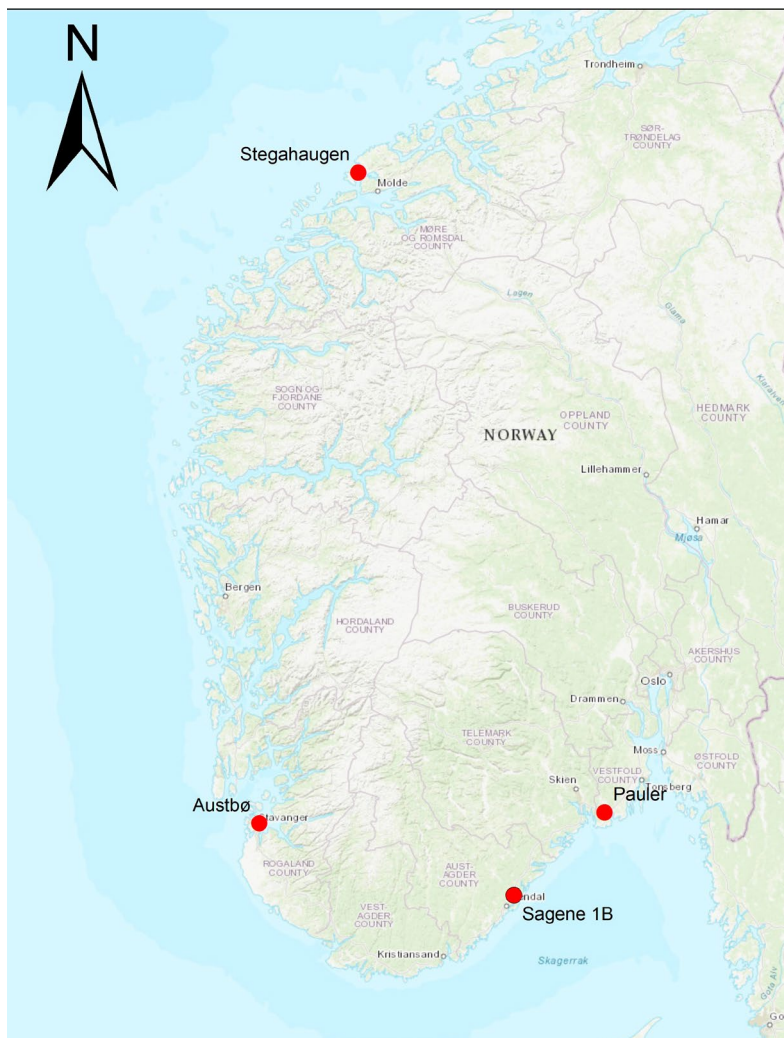


Figure 2.1. Map of southern Norway with geographical position of sites mentioned in the text. Note that the total number of surveyed Early Mesolithic sites in Norway as a whole is over a thousand (see Breivik 2014, fig. 3a; 2016, fig. 4). Map by author.

The early Mesolithic lifeway was one of enormous duration and durability. This chapter takes its point of departure in the intriguing question of why it lasted so long. This non-change in technological strategy stands in contrast to an unstable and changing early postglacial environment. Several authors have suggested that the early Mesolithic technology is of a flexible nature, and one that fits a number of economic and environmental situations.⁹ Thus, an explanation of the resilience of this tool tradition could be its suitability in a changing world. This understanding aligns well with interpretations that will be suggested here. I will, however, take this issue a step further, and suggest additional interrelated factors.

The transmission of knowledge throughout generations would be a key issue. The long tradition of the Early Stone Age implies that the general technologies of living during the entire period, were repeatedly successfully transmitted to the younger generation. This ‘success’ might be described as a perfect socialization process; if children do exactly the same as their parents and other adult members of their domestic group, society does not change. The unchanging blade technology of the Early Mesolithic might be regarded as proxy for successful socialization at large. In turn, this poses the question of which structures of the early Mesolithic life-world *permitted* the transmission of knowledge to linger throughout the centuries.

Contributions by Berg-Hansen,¹⁰ as well as Apel and others,¹¹ both make a case for the forces of *tradition*. Tradition is not only stronger than adaptation; it is also a sturdy force against human inclinations to pursue change. A child is a world-open being, ready to let itself be shaped by its environment (at large) and create the world anew. One should think that this openness would warrant change. However, tradition seems to override this; tradition *is*, so to say, social life and social life *is* the transmission of knowledge to the younger part of society. In the legacy of Marcel Mauss,¹² traditions are thus regarded as *effective* insofar as they are considered valuable and preferable. Berg-Hansen and Apel and others assign the *vertical* (parents-to-child) and *oblique* (other adult-to-child) transmission of knowledge to be the main forces of tradition. Any context of stone tool production — as in this particular case, the blade concept involving soft (e.g., antler hammer) direct percussion — involves a given kinaesthetic, motoric, and mental knowledge. Through the attainment of these practices over many years, this silent know-how becomes part of the body’s cultural repertoire. Tradition this way becomes incorporated; as sturdy techniques of the body, this knowledge is ready to be transmitted to new generations.

Against this background, there is perhaps nothing more to say. Yet, I believe some key factors of this special context added strength to the forces of tradition. These factors, I suggest, are to be found in the special environmental situation and the historical legacy of the pioneering foragers. Moreover, the early Mesolithic settlement structure, and ultimately the family dynamics that this structure manifests, might have provided optimal conditions for the continuation of inherited practices. As I argue, the preservation of a tradition similar to the Early Mesolithic — among other factors — is dependent on a situation in which

⁹ Berg-Hansen 2017; 2018; Breivik and Callanan 2016.

¹⁰ Berg-Hansen 2017.

¹¹ Apel and others 2018.

¹² See Schlanger 2006.

adults and children share a substantial amount of their time together at the residential base site. This chapter is an investigation of the phenomenon of a lasting tradition — through a discussion of interrelationships between family structure, environment, foraging strategies, and egalitarianism. Before this discussion may begin, however, a brief elaboration of the early Mesolithic setting is needed (Fig. 2.1).

The Setting

The Environment

The Preboreal phase represents the transition from an arctic to a subarctic climate.¹³ Environmental changes took place rapidly, especially in temperature, vegetation, and sea level.¹⁴ Even if this situation has no current analogy, Svalbard of today may work as a comparison for the earliest Preboreal and one that paints a picture of a milieu of drifting pack ice and frozen fjords.¹⁵ Abrupt tectonic events, like earthquakes and landslides would have been normal incidents,¹⁶ as was the existence of floating icebergs in the outer part of the Oslo-fjord (until 8700 cal BC) and in the deep fjords of western and northern Norway.¹⁷ A period of cooling took place between 9300 and 9200 cal BC. In central Norway, however, this early Holocene oscillation apparently had no effect on archaeological visibility as there is no decrease in the number of sites.¹⁸

Preboreal summers were hot and dry, due to increased solar radiation at the Glacial-Postglacial transition. At the Glacial/Postglacial transition birch vegetation was in the early phases of establishment, and from 8800 cal BC, lowland areas were probably fully covered by forests.¹⁹ Still, the outer coast was probably more of a barren landscape of glacially abraded rocky outcrops. Here, the vegetation was characterized by alpine species, like dwarf birch, grass and half-grass species, as well as heather carrying edible berries.²⁰ This rocky landscape contained terraces of minerogenic gravel with no development of soil,²¹ spaces soon to become potential places for pioneer dwelling.

According to Breivik's compilation of environmental data from Norway, marine faunal diversity was con-

siderably larger than the terrestrial.²² This favourable resource situation was a year-round phenomenon along the coasts of Norway. Thus, the Norwegian coasts were highly productive marine environments. Conditions can be reconstructed and compared to late Glacial and Preboreal finds from the coast of western Sweden.²³ The number and variability of fish species were high, and dense shoals of smaller fish species like capelin and herring provided the main food for seals, whales, and seabirds, as well as larger fish species. In the words of Bjerck the marine environments can be described in terms of 'large populations of ringed seal, harp seal, bearded seal [...] [and] abundant colonies of varied species of maritime birds.'²⁴

The presence of terrestrial mammals is not clear. Aaris-Sørensen and others²⁵ confirm the presence of reindeer in today's northern Germany and Denmark until the end of the Preboreal. Reindeer migrated up the western coast of Sweden in late Glacial and Preboreal times, but according to Jonsson,²⁶ and due to lack of land bridges, it is uncertain whether they were present in eastern Norway. Reindeer might, however, have migrated from a westward direction; a find of reindeer bones from Egersund, dated to $10,255 \pm 80$ years uncal BP,²⁷ testifies to the presence of the species in lowland south-western Norway at the late Glacial/Preboreal transition. As we shall see, early Mesolithic reindeer hunting in the mountains of south-western and western-central parts of the country attests to the continued existence of this animal throughout the earliest Stone Age and further on.

The Economy

No faunal remains have been found from early Mesolithic sites. Hence, direct evidence of economic activities is totally lacking. However, current consensus is that early Mesolithic groups primarily were marine foragers, i.e., seal hunters.²⁸ This assumption is based on the location of most early Mesolithic sites. Thus, in the western-central parts of Norway 87 per cent of 244 sites are situated in the outer archipelago, 8 per cent around heads of fjords, 2 per cent in the inner fjords, and 3 per cent in the mountains.²⁹ This settlement pattern is more or less representative of the entire Norwegian coast. Seal hunting as the main economic activity seems

13 Breivik 2016, 84.

14 Jonsson 2014.

15 Bjerck 2008d, 66.

16 Kleppe 2018, 36.

17 Sørensen and others 2014.

18 Breivik 2014, fig. 4.

19 Cf. Breivik 2016, 61.

20 Sørensen and others 2014.

21 Linderholm 2014.

22 Breivik 2016, 81.

23 Schmitt and others 2006; 2009; Jonsson 2014; 2018.

24 Bjerck 2008d, 66.

25 Aaris-Sørensen and others 2007.

26 Jonsson 2014; 2018, 25.

27 Bang-Andersen 2012.

28 e.g., Bjerck 2009; 2017; Breivik 2014.

29 Svendsen 2018; Breivik and Bjerck 2018, fig. 7.3.

reasonable, given the location of the sites as well as the abundance of seals in these environments. This marine prey probably served as day-to-day staple food as well as providing raw materials like bones, sinew, and skin. Seals also delivered fat and blubber for pyre and for the maintenance of skin boats. Despite the lack of direct evidence, it would be realistic to think that fishing, fowling, and gathering were part of the pioneers' economic repertoire.

The early Mesolithic population incorporated a legacy as late upper Palaeolithic reindeer hunters of the European continent. As will be explained in the section below, this is manifest in the lithic tradition. The continuation of the close relationship with reindeer is obvious from the presence of sites in the high mountain areas of Rogaland (south-western Norway),³⁰ and Møre og Romsdal (western-central Norway).³¹ As in the coastal region, there are no faunal remains present in this inland environment. Still, the evidence of reindeer hunting is as direct as it can be. At this stage in environmental history, reindeer would be the only prey present and the anticipation of a good reindeer hunt would be the principal reason for going up into the mountains.

From the material presented above, it can be stated that early Mesolithic groups were procuring seal for their day-to-day subsistence, while reindeer hunting took place periodically in the mountains. Whether reindeer were hunted episodically in coastal regions is an unresolved issue. This animal lived in lowland Continental Europe during most of the Preboreal. One could therefore imagine a seasonal presence in the inner coastal zones of today's Norway. Lowland reindeer hunting during autumn and late winter could thus be a possibility.

The Lithic Technology and its Origins

The earliest settlement of Norway has been discussed with regard to origin and cultural affinity. Discourse has centred around the connection between the Norwegian and Swedish Fosna/Komsa/Hensbacka tradition on the one side, and those of the Continental European Ahrensburg (Late Upper Palaeolithic) and the Maglemose (Early Mesolithic) of southern Scandinavia on the other. The earliest settlement of the Norwegian coast is now believed to have its origin in this alleged annual presence of the Maglemose and Ahrensburg groups in western Sweden.³² The origin of

the first settlement of today's Norway has, however, been discussed through several phases of our disciplinary history. A renewed interest in the question started in the late nineties with a detailed enquiry of tanged points,³³ blade technology,³⁴ and the *chaîne opératoire*.³⁵ This approach has added, and still produces, nuances to this discussion.³⁶ Still, the intimate connection between the late upper Palaeolithic tool tradition and the Early Mesolithic in Norway is beyond dispute. This implies that groups coming into the new lands of the north carried with them a blade production technology several millennia old.

A statement regarding the durability of the early Mesolithic tradition could be given, and, in line with Leroi-Gourhan,³⁷ be understood in terms of *know-how* (*connaissance*) and *knowledge* (*savoir-faire*). The former denotes the transmittable aspects of the given concept, more precisely the information that an apprentice receives from an instructor. Know-how could thus be the formal schemes of 'how to proceed' (cf. *schema opératoire*), to accomplish the anticipated blanks and tools, and mental images thereof. Knowledge, on the other hand, refers to the accompanying bodily knowledge. These are skills that are achieved through practice over a fair amount of time and represent motoric, tacit abilities. Knowledge could be described as 'history incorporated'. As such, the early Mesolithic technology was part of a late Glacial, Continental embodiment that continued for several hundred years in the environments of the Scandinavian peninsula.

The early Mesolithic blade technology can be described as a soft hammer (antler, soft stone) direct technique.³⁸ The removal of blades is made at an acute angle on the platform of cores that typically are one-sided, either with one or two opposing platforms ('prismatic') and an emerging use of sub-conical cores. Blades were preforms of formal tools, like knives, scrapers, burins, and arrowheads. The focus here is on blades as the outset for the many forms of projectile points, with Ahrensburgian tanged points, single-edged points, and lanceolate microliths as the characteristic types. In Norway, Høgnipen points, or 'drill-bits' are typical along with variations on the tanged point-microlith spectrum (oblique points, rhomboid points, Zonhoven points). Important to note is that the site assemblages generally

³⁰ Bang-Andersen 1990; 2003a; 2003b; 2012; 2018.

³¹ Callanan 2007; Ramstad and Linge 2015.

³² Berg-Hansen 2017; Glørstad 2014; Kindgren 1996; Schmitt 1994; 1995; 1999.

³³ Høgestøl and others 1995; Fischer 1996.

³⁴ Fuglestad 2007; 2009 [2001]; 2010; Kutschera 1999; Waraas 2001.

³⁵ e.g., Lemmonier 1976; Skar and Coulson 1986; 1987; Edmonds 1990; Pelegrin 1990; Eriksen 2000.

³⁶ Berg-Hansen 2017.

³⁷ Leroi-Gourhan 1993 [1964].

³⁸ e.g., Fuglestad 2007; 2009; Berg-Hansen 2017; 2018; Waraas 2001.

demonstrate *a strong focus towards the production of blades and, ultimately of the mentioned point categories.*

From Continental contexts, preserved carcasses of reindeer and aurochs have tanged points or lanceolates still present in parts of their skeletons. Thus, the only positive knowledge we have regarding the function of early Mesolithic flint projectiles is that they were used for the hunting of terrestrial mammals.³⁹ The continuation of the interest in reindeer — as well as the technology's association with large game hunting — can be observed as sites from hunting forays in the mountains of western and central parts of Norway. Despite an abundance of resources along the coast on the Scandinavian peninsula, these groups occasionally made great efforts in pursuing reindeer far inland. From this, it can be stated that the early Mesolithic groups incorporated a tradition as reindeer hunters, one that was imbued in their very technology, their technical skills, and bodily knowledge,⁴⁰ in short, it was part and parcel of their habitus.

Does this mean that the intense production of points at the settlements along the coast was exclusively directed towards the hunting of reindeer? What then, of technologies connected to seal hunting? Other things being equal, a bone and antler technology was probably present as well, in the form of barbed points/harpoons. Still, why this intense production of flint arrowheads at the coast? This is an enigma; however, Breivik and Callanan have discussed the potentially strong flexible nature of this specific technology and claimed that the early Mesolithic tool industry was easily transferable to other foraging activities such as marine hunting.⁴¹

The Settlement Pattern, Mobility, and Social Organization

Early Mesolithic settlements along the coasts are situated at elevated shorelines, due to isostatic uplift after the Last Glaciation. In the early Preboreal, this process involved a relatively rapid drop in sea level. Sites are intimately connected to suitable harbours for landing umiak-like boats. The rapid regression created a situation in which sites soon lost their relevance, and there was consequently a certain time window during which each of the dwelling places was adequate for groups of seafaring foragers. This is particularly marked in eastern Norway. In the Oslo-fjord area the regression of the coastline was up to 9 m per 100 years,⁴² i.e., 9 cm per year. This may potentially have created situations in

which the groups — on their 'next' visit — could not reuse the place of their last transit. However, perhaps a new harbour had been raised from the sea? An example of this is the Pauler site complex in Vestfold. Here, the settlement is situated at levels from 130 to 98 m above the present sea level. This way, the Pauler site-complex represents a time sequence of residentially mobile groups passing by this area during four hundred years of the Preboreal.

Settlements and settlement organization may take their point of departure in what is referred to as 'find areas' of typically two–three main concentrations of lithic debris from *in situ* activities. Within such a find area one or two fireplaces are common, and in a number of cases, there are traces of a dwelling structure, either as a cleared surface and/or stones of a certain size appearing in more or less clear circle formations; stones that served the function of weights for a tent's hide canvas. 'Find areas' like these are currently tentatively interpreted as *site units*, or *household units*. Early Mesolithic dwelling units (tent ring, cleared surface) more specifically measure between 4 and 12 m², while site units as a whole vary between 8 to 40 m².⁴³

An unclarified question is whether the Early Mesolithic site unit represents a 'task group', i.e., a hunting party, or a core family. Neither of the possibilities can be ruled out; interestingly, however, the pattern of household units also have similar outlines in the mountain areas. If we assume that the mountain dwellings represent hunting parties — this once again testifies to the alleged flexibility of the overall technologies of living. Still, and as will be argued further below, a strong case can be made for the household unit as representing a core family, or similar constellation.

Landscape terraces including *several* of the described household units is a site type that has come to our attention recently. Such sites may be termed multi-household or *multi-unit sites*. Only a few multi-unit sites have been excavated and presented so far; among a few others, these are Austbø,⁴⁴ Pauler 1 (Fig. 2.2) and Pauler 2,⁴⁵ Sagene 1B,⁴⁶ and Nordre Stegahaugen⁴⁷ (cf. Fig. 2.1). The recognition of this site type raises questions about early Mesolithic social organization; are they the result of several visits by one household group at the time, or do they represent one visit by several households together — or both?

39 Fuglestad 2009; 2012; cf. Åstveit 2018, 263.

40 Cf. Dugstad 2007, 107–08.

41 Breivik and Callanan 2016.

42 Sørensen and others 2014; Jakslund 2014, fig. 11.

43 e.g., Bang-Andersen 2003a; 2003b; Breivik and Bjerck 2018; Fretheim and others 2018; Fuglestad 2010; Nærøy 1995; 2000; Skar and Coulson 1986; 1987; Åstveit 2018.

44 Dugstad 2007; 2018.

45 Jakslund and Persson 2014; Nyland 2012.

46 Viken 2018.

47 Bjerck 2008a; 2008b; 2008c.

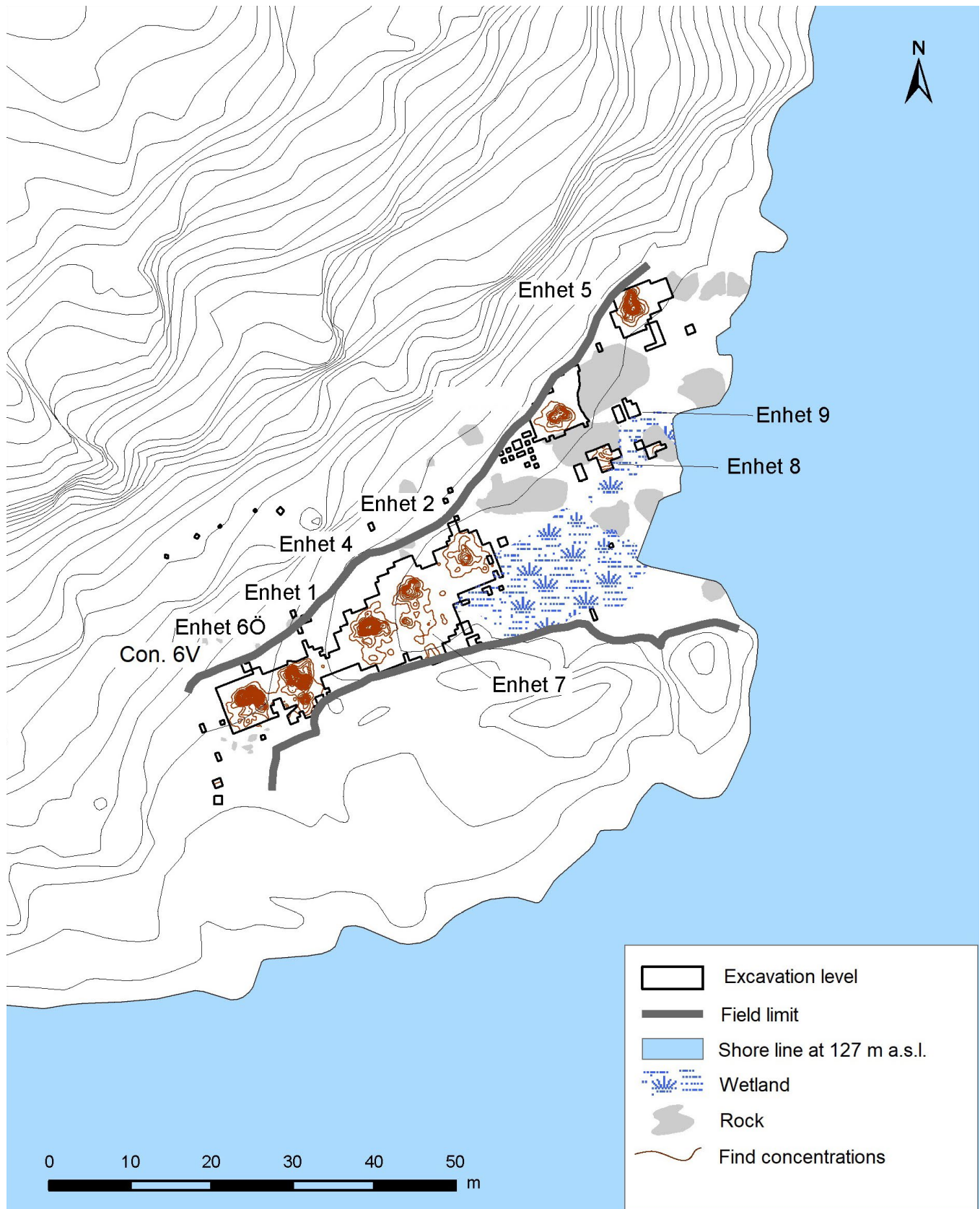


Figure 2.2. Find distribution maps of Pauler 1 with site units outlined. The number of site units is probably seven. Illustration by Per Persson. Reproduced with kind permission.

The mentioned sites contain four to seven site units; Nordre Stegahaugen, however, represents an extreme case with eighteen site units. Several visits to the same sites should not be ruled out as a factor,⁴⁸ particularly in cases like Nordre Stegahaugen. More research is needed to clarify the issue of contemporaneity of sites units. On a preliminary level, I will however make a tentative case for the contemporaneity of site units, and argue that *aspects* of multi-unit sites represent a true image of several households residing together. Preliminary evidence can be drawn from the Pauler site complex. Several of the seven defined site units at Pauler 1 seem to be internally ‘independent’, in the sense that all stages of tool production are present in every household.⁴⁹ Still, the internal distribution of tools seems complementary and suggests that units were also co-operating. Of relevance here is Nyland’s preliminary refitting analysis on the ‘next site’, Pauler 2.⁵⁰ The results of this study indicate strict contemporaneity and some degree of specialization of activities amongst three out of four site units; they thus, somehow, seem complementary and contemporary. Bjerck,⁵¹ in his interpretation of Nordre Stegahaugen suggests a measure that may give an idea, in coarse resolution, of how to interpret the eighteen site units. With a point of departure in the experience that one unit typically contains about three thousand lithic artefacts, the total number of finds from the site could be divided by this number. From this calculation, and as a cautious hypothesis, Bjerck suggests that the eighteen units represent forty-eight visits by the above-described basic social unit of a few people. In line with the hypothesis suggested, the many units represent cases in which for example four to seven households occupy the same place on several occasions.

A central question is what these multi-unit sites really represent in a concrete way. Even if the answer is implicit in recent works on the pioneer period, there is, to my knowledge, nobody who, so far, has ascribed this setting with a defined social form, other than ‘family-based groups’. But this requires further clarification. Kelly has presented works including large volumes of compiled data about hunter-gatherers on a worldwide scale.⁵² If there is one anthropological universal fact pertaining to hunter-gatherers — irrespective of their placement on the forager-collector spectrum — it would be that the basic social group is the *extended family*, indeed something that equates to the ‘minimum band’. An extended family may consist of a middle-aged couple

and their children and their families. In a residentially mobile foraging situation, this translates to between eighteen and twenty-five people in total. I suggest multi-unit sites of the Early Mesolithic be connected to what anthropology defined as the extended family. The universally estimated number of persons of this basic social unit would fit well with the multi-household sites of the pioneer time. Thus, the early Mesolithic settlement pattern represents short habitation phases of three to five core families, sometimes with the addition of a couple of the older generation. These eighteen to twenty-five persons should be considered part of a larger group of an unknown few hundred, which are constellations associated with cyclical aggregations. Site units of the ‘single’ kind, i.e., only one household unit present at a site (see examples in the beginning of this section) may represent the division of extended families into single core families temporarily operating on their own — or hunting parties/task groups.

The highly mobile lifestyle of these communities is indisputable. The settlement pattern of the Early Mesolithic in all probability represents a population that, in the terminology of Binford,⁵³ were *residentially mobile foragers*.⁵⁴ This implies, in contrast to semi-sedentary *collectors*, that the domestic unit/extended family is regularly on the move for resources. The seeking out of new places of treasure — settings providing good harbours and easy access to seal colonies — was probably the motivation for moving on. We might speculate about the length of each stay based on comparisons with the most mobile hunter-gatherers of the northern hemisphere, i.e., on the American continent. The Baffinland Inuit and the Ona both make about sixty residential moves per year, while the Montagnais make fifty changes of their domestic unit per year.⁵⁵ These numbers imply that the most mobile among historically known hunter-gatherers, *on average*, stay six to seven days at each place. Perhaps this *average* could be illustrative of the early Mesolithic situation.

Men ‘at Home’

Leroi-Gourhan’s approach to technology leans heavily on the legacy of Mauss and his concept of techniques.⁵⁶ According to Mauss, techniques are *effective*, i.e., functional, but also by nature conservative. The transmission of complex knowledge (cf. the difference between know-how and knowledge) provides a central theoretical

48 e.g., Breivik 2020.

49 Schaller-Åhrberg 2012, 123.

50 Nyland 2018.

51 Bjerck 2008c.

52 Kelly 2013, and see Binford 2001.

53 Binford 1980.

54 e.g., Breivik and Callanan 2016; Breivik and Bjerck 2018.

55 Kelly 2013, table 4.1 with references.

56 Leroi-Gourhan 1993 [1964]. See Schlanger 2006.

foundation in recent contributions that regard blade technology as a proxy for the general transmission of traditions.⁵⁷ Theories of cultural transmission hold that for socialization to be successful, transfer of knowledge must largely take place from adults to children; alternatively, the young person is instructed by another adult member of the domestic unit.

The setting presented above implies core families roaming the pioneer landscape together. Moreover, it implies the presence of children and a diverse set of adults; mothers, fathers, uncles, aunts, and grandparents. The assumption regarding the presence of children at early Mesolithic sites may even be stated through direct evidence at sites in Rogaland, south-west Norway. Through refitted series from the site Galta 3, some cases of low technical competence were recognized;⁵⁸ this may represent the work of children. More importantly, Dugstad has presented an explicit case for the documentation of a child's technical abilities at Austbø.⁵⁹ Berg-Hansen's understanding of the successful transmission of knowledge — over centuries — during the Early Mesolithic is explained by a high level of investment in adults' teaching of children. The pioneer settlement system, i.e., the extended family, is thus a starting point for understanding an early Mesolithic child's achievement of knowledge; this is a setting characterized by the more or less continuous presence of several adults. Knutsson,⁶⁰ in her compilation of anthropological examples of egalitarian hunter-gatherers, describes learning as situations in which children take part in an organic manner; oral instructions are seldom given by adults, or they are delivered in a non-authoritative and tolerant style. Either way, the presence of the entire register of adult persons at the residential site, would warrant conditions for optimal learning.

As stated in the introduction, my argument is that the successful transmission of cultural practices lasted because children spent a substantial amount of time with women and men at different stages of adulthood. This residentially mobile context is one of an egalitarian social form and implies a great degree of overlap in the division of labour between women and men; perhaps we should imagine several of the technologies connected to the seal hunt as involving the entire domestic unit. In this context some thought should still be given to the potential for reindeer hunting; its seemingly occasional character might still be of interest.

Large game hunting is universally the most valued resource; it is, however, also connected to the highest

risk, not just logistically, but also socially. Coming back to camp empty-handed involves disappointment and potentially a considerable drop in prestige, while bringing home game gives accordingly high prestige. Even if there are several incidents of female hunting in prehistory as well as among historically recorded small-scale societies, big game is an activity primarily belonging to men.⁶¹ In other words, this task places a lot of pressure on fathers and young sons. Hunted large game is a source of high prestige and high risk and the hunter's obligation to share the meat with the rest of the group is a practice that may preserve an egalitarian form.⁶² This is not, however, without paradoxes and ambiguities; it may also be the source of a development in the other direction. Here, attention could be given to Sanday's cross-cultural study on female–male power balance and its relationship to big game hunting.⁶³ One source of emerging distance (in several senses of the word) and emerging inequality between women and men may take place when men spend much of their time on hunting trips away from the residential site.

As we have seen, the Early Mesolithic indicates an intimate integration of the domestic group, or extended family — only with occasional reindeer hunting forays into the mountains, or shorter trips away from the residential site. In a Preboreal setting, the hunting of reindeer in lowland environments would not involve long travels away from the domestic unit. Reindeer was probably a most sought-after prey, and we should imagine that not only the meat, but also the antlers were important raw materials in early Mesolithic technology.⁶⁴ At some level, and as a solid historical legacy, men must have had a strong identity as reindeer hunters. But given the fact that large game hunting also entails a lot of pressure on men, we could ask: could there be less stressful alternatives? The answer is inevitable — seals.

Organic material is totally lacking from this archaeological context, and thus we cannot know the economic basis of the pioneer groups. Bjerck (and others) may be correct in claiming that the presence of marine mammals was decisive for the decision of groups to move north. In the following scenario, I will take the alleged value of seals at face value. Another premise will be the ethnographically known phenomenon that in hunting societies, seals, when available, have proved to be a successful 'substitute' for large game.⁶⁵ Along with this, I take the perspective of men; early Mesolithic men

⁵⁷ Berg-Hansen 2017; 2018, see also Damlien 2016.

⁵⁸ Fuglestad 2007.

⁵⁹ Dugstad 2007; 2010.

⁶⁰ Knutsson 1995.

⁶¹ See for instance Kelly 2013, 64, 218–23 with references.

⁶² Fuglestad 2012.

⁶³ Sanday 1981.

⁶⁴ e.g., Mansrud 2017.

⁶⁵ Kelly 2013.

probably incorporated a legacy as reindeer hunters. This tradition, and everything it involved in terms of risk and stress, continued into the pioneer landscape; this environment, however, with its bounties of seals and maritime resources generally, provided a great opportunity. In this setting men would probably have experienced lower pressure and fewer expectations connected to hunting. Seals were abundant prey; they were easy to catch, and they represented little risk, but high chance of gain, involving *almost* the same prestige as large game. Seals could thus be a guarantee of life, as they provided an essential food resource, skin for boats, fat, sinew, pyre (blubber), and clothes, etc. Colonies of seals and other marine animals thrived close by the residential site in the outer archipelago; this way, men could stay ‘at home’. Throughout the Preboreal era, they had the possibility of remaining good providers, but at a low cost. This not only might have reduced stress, but more importantly, it secured the presence of men in the residential area most of the time. We do not know if lithic production was a task of women or men, or both; the premise here is rather to point out the centrality of the role of adults, as representing

‘a complete’ community of inherited traditions, a community available for young people most of the time. This way, the child could receive knowledge from a wide range of significant others.

Throughout the Early Mesolithic a strong presence of the adult community at large was, I suggest, one key factor in the preservation and durability of a given technological concept. Inherited from the Late Upper Palaeolithic of Continental Europe, this concept belonged to a tradition of blade- and tool manufacture that prevailed for another thousand years in the landscapes of the Scandinavian peninsula during the Early Mesolithic.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have attempted to point out how the combined forces of an egalitarian tradition, a given environmental opportunity, and a foraging strategy structuring the presence of men ‘at home’ — together may have created optimal conditions for the transmission of knowledge throughout the centuries of the Early Mesolithic era.

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3. Why Patrilocal Female Exogamy?

A Critical View on Kinship in the Nordic Bronze Age

Gender and sex have been at the forefront of many studies of the Nordic Bronze Age (NBA, 1700–500 BC). Well-preserved and well-dressed Bronze Age bodies from a selection of monumental burials have fed theories about a society with fixed and clearly defined gender roles. New scientific data have further aided interpretations of sex, mobility, and kinship. While genes and isotopes are wonderful sources of information that we have only begun to explore, and which can inform our understanding of gendered practices, it is interesting to see how traditional ideas about kinship seem to continue to thrive on these new datasets. Thus, so far, when it comes to social institutions, the third scientific revolution in archaeology has tended to reproduce traditional thinking. At the same time, in contemporary identity discourses gender is contested as never before. Coverage of new Bronze Age discoveries in popular media shows how gender can tie in with issues related to heritage and origin. An example is recent research into the Egtved girl, a powerful symbol of the Danish past. How many remember where they were on April Fools' Day 2008, when news broke that scientists had uncovered that Egtved was in fact a boy?¹ I do, and I remember being surprised and somehow amused. Judging from the media reception,² the news — following the interpretation of strontium isotopes in 2015 — that the Egtved girl came from the Black Forest in present-day Germany was no less provocative. Egtved's mobility pattern has been discussed

as an example of patrilocal female exogamy.³ Is the archaeological record actually consistent with such a patrilineal structure where kinship centred around the father's line, and females moved to live with the husband's family? Drawing on a comparative approach to kinship, this chapter challenges the one-sided focus on patrilineal descent and female exogamy in current interpretations and argues that a bilateral — or cognatic — descent structure may better explain NBA mobility and burial patterns.

Gender in the Nordic Bronze Age

In this text, the new burgeoning interest in mobility patterns made possible by aDNA and isotope tracers⁴ will be discussed against more traditional archaeological approaches to gender and mobility based on iconographic or other evidence.⁵ My interpretations and viewpoints in this chapter are indebted to a strong research tradition in the Nordic realm, where clothes, ornaments, weapons, and tools are conceived as elements of a situated, gendered habitus.⁶ Costume and appearance are convincingly argued to be subject to rules and regulations rooted in the social,⁷ and are therefore also highly relevant for a discussion about lineage and kinship. The unique

- 1 Allegedly based on aDNA analysis at Statens Retsgenetiske Laboratorium on behalf of the National Museum of Denmark (Nationalmuseet 2008). The April Fools' Day joke was later repeated in *Vejle Amts Folkeblad*, Pahuš 2019.
- 2 e.g., local and international news channels in 2015 (TV SYD 2015) and again in 2019–2021 (videnskab.dk 2021).

- 3 e.g., Bergerbrant 2019a. This was not explicitly argued by Frei and others 2015, but soon appeared in the media (e.g., BBC News 2015).
- 4 e.g., Frei and others 2015; Reiter and others 2019; Felding and others 2020; Reiter and Frei 2021.
- 5 e.g., Kristiansen and Larsson 2005; Engedal 2010; Iversen 2014; Kaul 2022; Melheim and Sand-Eriksen 2020.
- 6 e.g., Sørensen 1992; 1997; 2013; Treherne 1995; Bergerbrant 2007; Skogstrand 2016; Frieman and others 2017; Felding 2020; Walsh and others 2022, cf. Robb and Harris 2018, 130.
- 7 Kristiansen 2013.

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Figure 3.1. The Egtved oak-log burial showing her well-preserved costume and burial goods. Photo: Roberto Fortuna and Kira Ursem, National Museum of Copenhagen, CC BY-SA. Reproduced with permission.

preservation of bodies, clothing, and other organic burial equipment from oak-log burials allow rare insight into how gender was performed in the NBA, and especially its early part (c. 1500–1100 BC). On the basis of the textile finds, two types of female costume have been identified: a large wrap-around probably used as a long skirt (or a peplos), and a knee-length skirt made of cords.⁸ The female costumes have attracted more attention than the male dress,⁹ and discussions have centred around different, gender-specific social roles. While both costumes included a short blouse, one or several tablet-woven belts, and similar jewellery, headdresses and hairdos are strikingly different.¹⁰ We must bear in mind that these individuals came from the upper strata of society, hence are representative only for a small part of the Nordic population. The lack of preserved textiles from later parts of the NBA, following changes in burial ritual,¹¹ is also problematic, but judging from jewellery traditions a degree of conservatism may be hypothesized.¹² Miniature bronze figurines from the eleventh–eighth centuries BC may possibly show the continued existence of two types of female dress in the Late Bronze Age.¹³

Egtved wore a corded skirt when she was buried in Denmark 1370 BC (Fig. 3.1). The idea that the corded

skirt demarcated females with a particular role in society, or a certain stage in the life of a woman, has been persistent. Thomsen's idea that it was a summer dress, or the attire of unmarried women, emerged from the promiscuous impression these skirts made on early twentieth-century interpreters.¹⁴ Others have argued that corded skirts were for married women, or, for reproductive yet unmarried women.¹⁵ Following suit, although not necessarily intended as catch-all explanations, skirt-bearers have received labels like priestesses,¹⁶ ritual experts,¹⁷ acrobats,¹⁸ and yoga practitioners.¹⁹ Lately, the corded skirt has been associated with elite females with access to interregional trade networks, perhaps themselves involved in trade and travel.²⁰

In a groundbreaking study, Bergerbrant argued, contrary to earlier research, that the corded skirt was an ordinary garment, worn by people of various ages, and possibly in everyday use.²¹ She listed forty-eight examples of corded skirts or tubes/beads from such in Early Bronze Age contexts; forty-three of these are from high-status burials and five from hoards.²² Finds of corded skirts are lacking from the first period of the Bronze Age, which possibly indicates that the fashion was taken

8 Bergerbrant 2007, 58. Kristiansen 2013 argued that the two female garments belonged to one costume. In light of the (smaller) wrap-around in Egtved's burial, this is not unlikely.
9 But see, Treherne 1997; Bergerbrant 2007; Skogstrand 2016; Walsh and others 2022.
10 Bergerbrant 2007, 90–91. Similarly, two categories of female gender were identified in central Europe on the basis of headdresses by Sørensen in 1997.
11 Bergerbrant 2019b, table 11.1, lists fifteen textile fragments from the Late against 346 from the Early Bronze Age.
12 Kristiansen 2013.
13 Worn by otherwise naked males and females; see Randsborg 2011, 211; Bergerbrant 2014a; Melheim 2015.

14 Thomsen 1929, 195–96, cf. Bergerbrant 2014a, 84.
15 Eskildsen and Lomborg 1976. From this follows various attempts to separate married from unmarried women on the basis of skirt length and dress-accessories; see e.g., Engedal 2010, 291; Randsborg 2011; Kristiansen 2013, cf. Bergerbrant 2007, 55–60; 2014.
16 Kristiansen and Larsson 2005, 298, 306.
17 Randsborg 2011, 87, 114.
18 Iversen 2014.
19 Oma and Melheim 2019.
20 Reiter and others 2019, 11–12; Kristiansen 2023, 92.
21 Bergerbrant 2014a, see also Fossey and Bergerbrant 2013; Bergerbrant and Wessman 2018.
22 Bergerbrant 2014a, tables 1–2; Bergerbrant and others 2017, 41. Mainly from barrows; one non-monumental burial is a rich flat grave.

up after 1500 BC. This ties in well with the observation that the skirt-bearers were females with the right to be buried in mounds, a new burial tradition established c. 1500 BC by an elite with connections to the Tumulus culture.²³ A source of error is the fact that corded skirts without bronze beads, as exemplified by Egtved, are underrepresented, and may have predated the fashion with tubes. Not only are textiles rare in Late Bronze Age contexts, tube finds are also few and far between. Therefore, the above-mentioned bronze figurines are our main source for the continued use of this garment c. 1100–700 BC. On this basis, Bergerbrant suggested that corded skirts went from being a common outfit in the Early Bronze Age, to becoming an antiquarian dress with connection to ritual in the Late Bronze Age.

Examples of cross-dressing in art and a few gender hybrid burials allow us to hypothesize that a ‘third gender’ or non-binary gender identities were sometimes thematized in ritual settings. The clearest case are the assumed male representations in the Grevensvænge hoard (c. 1100–900 BC) from Zealand, who wear skirts otherwise associated with females.²⁴ The bulk of evidence seems, however, to indicate that a binary gender structure was dominant and normative.²⁵ This is in keeping with the insight that gender stereotypes tend to serve as the very basis for contesting gender, and that transgender practices often reinforce binary stereotypes.²⁶ Similarly, although a cultural acceptance of male homosexual relations can be induced from a few same-sex double burials,²⁷ the dominant pattern when it comes to double-burials is binary, i.e., a female and a male.²⁸

Why Patrilocal Female Exogamy?

Following the dominant trend in recent research in southern and central Europe,²⁹ the idea of patrilocal

female exogamy has tended to be reproduced in studies of the NBA.³⁰ A number of scholars have, however, argued against what they consider to be an implicit objectification of women in prehistory, and voiced alternative explanations for female mobility, or even argued for matrilocality.³¹ Not only is the risk of circular reasoning overwhelming if patrilocal female exogamy is *a priori* assumed and data interpreted to fit the model, there is also the risk that the model becomes a reductionist label with little explanatory value.³² Addressing the notoriously stereotyped image of female exogamy, Frieman and co-authors argued that we:

are presented with a gendered travel dichotomy in which men who travel do so for prestige, power, and influence [...] whilst women who travel do so for men — presumably the fathers, brothers, and husbands who are assessing and profiting from their reproductive and economic value.³³

To the contrary, anthropological and historical examples show that in-marriage women are often forerunners for cultural transmission and transfer of knowledge, and that marriage can be considered an opportunity for emancipation.³⁴ On a similar note, Brück pointed out that current uses of aDNA in archaeology ignore the fact that kinship is inherently social.³⁵ An exemplar case from the United Kingdom argued to contradict the patrilineal model is a Bell Beaker ring-ditch burial in Wiltshire, with five adult women and six children, and where the skull of a centrally placed woman had been removed, arguably to venerate a significant female ancestor.

In a study of gender in highly stratified Argaric society in Spain, an alternative image of kinship and power is presented. In La Almoloya (c. 1700–1600 BC), elite women were buried with diadems, argued to be emblematic objects of power, and men with swords and daggers. This, Lull and co-authors argued: ‘raise[s] the question of whether a class-based state society could be

²³ Bergerbrant and others 2017; Bergerbrant 2014a, 92. But they occur in some gallery graves.

²⁴ Beside two sitting male figurines with neck ring, loincloth, and axe, there was one, originally three, males with corded skirt, neck ring, and hat performing a bridge. A standing figurine, originally two, with neck ring, fibula, long skirt, and belt is possibly also male; see Melheim 2015 and references therein.

²⁵ Felding 2020; Felding and Stott 2023. Transgressions of the binary pattern occur in burials in Zealand c. 1300–900 BC; see Melheim 2015, 87–88 and references therein. Robb and Harris 2018 argued that gender was fluid during the Neolithic, but normatively binary in the Bronze Age.

²⁶ Hayes 2009, 93, 107–08, 151; Robb and Harris 2018, 133.

²⁷ Walsh and others 2022.

²⁸ Felding and Stott 2023, table 1.

²⁹ e.g., Knipper and others 2017; Mitnik and others 2019; Cavazzuti and others 2019; Sjögren and others 2020. Based on aDNA (mitochondrial and Y-chromosome), isotopes, and linguistic

data.

³⁰ e.g., Frei and others 2017; Felding 2020, 423; Felding and others 2020, 2; Kristiansen 2023.

³¹ e.g., Lull 2000; Bergerbrant 2007, 126–29; 2019a, 32; Frei and others 2017, 11; Reiter and Frei 2019; Frieman and others 2019; Booth and others 2020; Brück 2021; Furholt 2021; Bickle and Hofmann 2022.

³² This also regards linguistic evidence of family structure in Indo-European languages, when applied widely to all European groups following Yamnaya; see Sjögren and others 2020; Kristiansen 2023, cf. Olsen 2019.

³³ Frieman and others 2019, 156.

³⁴ Frieman and others 2019, 157–59; Felding 2020, 423; Sjögren and others 2020, 22, and references therein.

³⁵ Brück 2021.

ruled by women. Was El Argar an exception to the line of thought that, since Engels [...] links patriarchy and state power?³⁶ They contend that since weaponry was an effective means of enforcing political decisions, males may have played an executive role, while ideological legitimation and government lay in female hands. Any conclusions drawn from this regarding matrilocality or matrilineality³⁷ seem however to be countered by a fresh study of kinship in El Argar based on aDNA and genetic relatedness analysis.³⁸ This study gives valuable insight into family structure, concluding that patrilocality and patrilineal descent with reciprocal female exogamy was the preferred way to organize kinship and socio-political relations. Substantial mobility is noted, however, also among male adults, indicating perhaps that male exogamy was practised too. A lack of evidence for adult brothers or half-brothers is tentatively argued to indicate that: 'patrilocality was restricted to certain males.'³⁹ While this can be explained within a patrilineal structure as relating to primogeniture,⁴⁰ i.e., that only the first-born son inherits, it certainly demonstrates that males must have migrated and married out too, to make a living. Despite this, it is argued that El Argar evidence ties in with a general trend in Bronze Age Europe towards virilocal, patrilineal descent groups.⁴¹

Based on a review of bioarchaeological datasets, Booth and co-authors argued that there was substantial variability in how genetic ties were emphasized in Beaker Britain,⁴² and that while patrilineal descent seems to be emphasized, there is little evidence for patrilocality. In a study of Early Bronze Age south-eastern Europe, Žegarac and co-authors found female exogamy, but not strict patrilocality.⁴³ Knipper and others based their interpretation of female exogamy in Late Neolithic–Early Bronze Age Lech Valley in Germany on aDNA and isotopes, which showed a diversification in maternal lineages over time and a strong presence of non-local females.⁴⁴ It was also, however, pointed out that maternal kinship represented a significant relationship that was honoured in death and through

the transfer of wealth. An isotope study of the Hyksos dynasty in Egypt (c. 1640–1530 BC) showed that while most men were local, 77 per cent of the females were non-local, indicating female exogamy but also that alliances formed through female immigration were key in establishing the new regime.⁴⁵ Written sources show that while foreign women could marry into royal families, exogamy was prohibited for Egyptian royal women. They also demonstrate that Egyptian women could inhabit official roles, initiate divorce, inherit, and dispose of property, and be economically independent.⁴⁶

These examples show that there is considerable room for more nuanced approaches to exogamy as a social institution. Given the huge differences in social organization that existed across the Bronze Age world, it seems counter-intuitive to assume that there was only one way to organize kinship, and that this remained unchanged for over a millennium, from the Beaker period into the NBA.⁴⁷ Importantly, the cited studies draw on high-resolution genetic datasets of individuals buried together, and similar information is not yet available from the Nordic realm. An excellent opportunity for a fresh look at gender and kinship is, however, Felding's network analysis of a unique dataset of 5169 burials from Early Bronze Age Denmark, combined with isotope data.⁴⁸ Felding concluded that differences in wealth were related to rank and not gender; female status was demarcated on a par with male status, and this reflected the two genders' equal social standing in life as in death.⁴⁹ She demonstrated that an equal percentage of females and males received prominent, primary burial positions in mounds.⁵⁰ In an earlier study, Bergerbrant stressed regional and temporal variability in the distribution of burial wealth between women and men.⁵¹ A noted peak in female visibility in some parts of Scandinavia in NBA II (c. 1500–1300 BC) and a decline in female visibility in NBA III (c. 1300–1100 BC), is also reflected in the burial record from Rogaland, Norway,

³⁶ Lull and others 2021, 345.

³⁷ e.g., Lull 2000; 2011.

³⁸ Villalba-Mouco and others 2022. Based on data from sixty-eight individuals mostly from La Almoloya, and reflected, among other things, in a high degree of Y-chromosome stability and mtDNA diversity.

³⁹ Villalba-Mouco and others 2022, 10.

⁴⁰ For discussions about primogeniture in Neolithic–Bronze Age Europe, see Olsen 2019; Sjögren and others 2020; Fitzpatrick 2023; Kristiansen 2023.

⁴¹ Villalba-Mouco and others 2022, 11.

⁴² Booth and others 2020.

⁴³ Žegarac and others 2021.

⁴⁴ Knipper and others 2017; Mitnik and others 2019. But, see Ensor 2021, 54; Furholt 2021.

⁴⁵ Stantis and others 2020, 10.

⁴⁶ Ayad 2022; Skumsnes 2022.

⁴⁷ Patrilocal, female exogamy is argued to have existed for eight hundred years in Bavaria, Germany, c. 2500–1700 BC; see Knipper and others 2017; Sjögren and others 2020. Linguistic evidence is taken to indicate that early Indo-Europeans were by definition patrilocal; see Olsen 2019, cf. Kristiansen and Larsson 2005, 236–38.

⁴⁸ Felding 2020; Felding and others 2020; Felding and Stott 2023.

⁴⁹ Felding 2020, 425–28; Felding and Stott 2023, 148.

⁵⁰ Arguably, the higher number of registered high-status male burials is due to taphonomic and research historical biases; see Felding and Stott 2023, 148. In NBA II, 33 per cent of female burials were primary burials, against 16 per cent in NBA III, the total of 21 per cent corresponds to the per cent of male primary burials in Vejle; see Felding 2020, 441.

⁵¹ Bergerbrant 2007, 87–91.

where richly furnished female burials outnumbered rich male burials in period II, and held a larger variation of metal items.⁵² In period III, most wealthy burials were socially male.

The evidence from El Argar allows us to rethink the status of NBA females buried with daggers or diadems. In Denmark, daggers are present in c. 20 per cent of the female burials and a functional sword was found in one grave which is argued to be female.⁵³ The overprovision of grave-goods in female burials during NBA II in Rogaland, Norway included a high number of daggers. This and the occurrence of diadems in Scandinavian burials can be argued to indicate that some females had access to power positions in society.⁵⁴ Diadems are however rare and possibly associated with immigrant women. An eight-year-old girl buried with a diadem at Abbekås in Scania, Sweden has been discussed as a possible example of female fostering and network connections with the Lüneburg culture.⁵⁵ This demonstrates another significant aspect of the NBA; that individuals of both genders show dual or multi-local identities.⁵⁶ It also seems clear that women partook in arenas traditionally understood as male domains, e.g., travel and networking, and that individuals of both genders migrated.⁵⁷ Against this background, one may ask whether there are any good reasons for maintaining the paradigm of strict patrilocality.

Are Other Kinship Models More Feasible?

Lineage is a widespread way to structure inheritance and property, and despite significant cross-cultural variability, kinship is considered the most important social institution in pre-industrial societies.⁵⁸ Kinship used to be pivotal in social anthropology, to the degree that British structuralist anthropology was once coined 'kinshipology'. Elaborate classifications were made in the post-war period, aimed at establishing universal rules which could reveal the principles of social structure.

These classifications form the backbone of archaeological discussions of kinship, which tend to ignore that they are analytical models, and not natural laws.⁵⁹

The main difference between a typical patrifocal and matrifocal society lies in how lineage is counted and whether descent, inheritance, and the household centres around the father's or the mother's family. Historically, strictly matrilineal societies seem to be comparatively fewer, and they must not be seen as mirror images of a patrilineal society, nor as matriarchies.⁶⁰ Until the 1960s little attention was paid to *cognatic* kinship, which is the second most common descent strategy worldwide.⁶¹ Cognatic kinship is counted through any combination of male and female links, and one variant is bilateral descent; where lineage is traced through both the father's and the mother's line.⁶² An interesting analogy is Viking society, traditionally viewed as bilateral.⁶³ Moen argued that:

Kinship ties, obligations and privileges were passed down through both father and mother [...]. This means that maternal and paternal lineage was credited equally, again something that is hard to reconcile with a society in which women were unimportant or deemed to be less able.⁶⁴

Since the number of ancestors doubles for each generation, cognatic systems are potentially unstable.⁶⁵ However, using only a portion of the potential flexibility, a cognatic system can just as well produce tight corporate groups, whilst at the same time allow for strategic choices between descent groups.⁶⁶ Ensor claimed that we need to completely rethink how we interpret bioarchaeological data:

Despite the growing consensus for patrilocality throughout the European Neolithic, the data used to arrive at that conclusion in most cases contradict patrilocality and in other cases are equally consistent with a number of more likely alternatives. *The problem is not with the data but in their interpretation.*⁶⁷

⁵² Austvoll 2021, 98, dataset 2. Compare Engedal 2010, 73–78.

⁵³ Felding and Stott 2023.

⁵⁴ Felding and Stott 2023. Only three of six diadems in the Danish dataset c. 1700–1300 BC are positively associated with females; one is from a male burial. Sweden has two diadems; see Bergerbrant 2007, 112.

⁵⁵ Bergerbrant 2007, 112–15; 2014b; Bergerbrant and others 2017, 43; Bergerbrant 2019c.

⁵⁶ Bergerbrant 2007, 121–23, 126; Felding 2020; Felding and others 2020; Felding and Stott 2023, 145; Felding 2023.

⁵⁷ e.g., Frei and others 2015; 2017; Reiter and others 2019; Reiter and Frei 2021; Kristiansen 2023; Streiffert Eikeland 2023.

⁵⁸ Keesing 1981, 216; Eriksen 1997, 97.

⁵⁹ Compare Lévi-Strauss 1969, who argued that kinship systems emerged from a universal incest taboo.

⁶⁰ Males tend to be politically and economically dominant, and the mother's brother is a significant character.

⁶¹ Ensor 2021, 24–28. Ensor points out how unfortunate it was that an authority like Lévi-Strauss defined 'kinship' as by definition unilineal and unilocal.

⁶² Eriksen 1997, 104–05.

⁶³ Sawyer 2014, 349; Moen 2019, 105 with references therein.

⁶⁴ Moen 2019, 107.

⁶⁵ Eriksen 1997, 105.

⁶⁶ Keesing 1981, 240–44.

⁶⁷ Ensor 2021, 1. Emphasis added.

In order to interpret archaeological and scientific data, a greater awareness is needed, he argued, of the intersectionality of descent, marriage, and residence. These three provide the contexts for 'gender dynamics, status relations, ancestries, identities, social memories, mobility, and the distribution of biological relatedness'.⁶⁸ On the basis of a larger variety of combinations of lineage and residence, Ensor promoted a new approach to bioarchaeological datasets, through which the ratio of non-local individuals in a given cemetery can be hypothesized.⁶⁹ He stressed, however, that the emphasis put on consanguineal relations varies greatly within any form of kinship system.⁷⁰ Furthermore, when it comes to cognatic descent systems, the pattern is unpredictable, as hugely varied marriage and residential strategies are to be expected.

Within 'new kinship studies' it is now widely established that kinship is not naturally pre-given, but undetermined and hybridized; 'an enabling metaphor' used actively to create bonds and imagined communities.⁷¹ Both blood relations and metaphorical relations are fundamental to the construction of kin, from the intimate level to social life writ large. Such metaphorical relations creating bonds with non-kin can be constituted through marriage, adoption, or agreement with allies.⁷² Importantly, blood kinship also needs to be socially confirmed to maintain relevance. However, despite the fact that biological non-kin like in-laws or an affine may be treated as kin, they may still be regarded as 'outsiders' with a liminal status, or what Helms considered as 'cosmological others'.⁷³ According to Helms, the othering of an affine is related to their position as being both inferior and superior, because of their bonds to other worlds and realms. Addressing Neolithic social organization, Neumann and Glørstad pointed out that: 'Kinship transcends space in that kin can move and still remain kin',⁷⁴ suggesting that in any kind of kinship system, mobility and relationships with the outside world is a factor.

One of the problems with labels like female exogamy is that multiple social roles and connections collapse into one. In order to understand kinship better, we need to address the multiplexity⁷⁵ of past relations.

A distinction between blood and metaphorical kinship is useful, although not unproblematic as a guiding principle in archaeology. An approach including metaphorical kinship challenges archaeology's ability to identify kin relations that are unrelated to biology. To avoid creating essentialist narratives, we need to resist the temptation to use comparative anthropology as checklists, and instead develop historically situated theories about how social institutions structured material culture.⁷⁶

Revisiting the Travelling Female

With the idea that costumes coded for gender and social status in the NBA as a backdrop, I will revisit the theory that Egtved and other elite women migrated around the 'age of marriageability', a theory that gained popularity with the new game-changing datasets that allow us to map individual mobility.⁷⁷ The idea that corded skirts reflect a form of female specialization is tightly knit to comparisons with images of dancers and acrobats in the Mediterranean.⁷⁸ A much closer parallel in terms of clothing technology are the woollen, corded skirts found in mummified burials from the Taklamakan desert of the Tarim Basin in present-day China (c. 2000–1500 BC), where males and females wore different types of waistcloths.⁷⁹ Barber argued that the female woollen corded skirts originated from an old tradition based on plant materials going back at least twenty thousand years, and that they symbolized women's childbearing ability.⁸⁰ As pointed out by Barber and others before her, puberty is cross-culturally an occasion for acquiring gender-specific costumes.⁸¹ The acquisition of female gender during middle childhood (c. six–twelve years) seems, for instance, to be indicated by central European burial evidence from the Beaker period, where younger girls were equipped with awls, whereas full female gear and status were achieved at

⁶⁸ Ensor 2021, 1.

⁶⁹ Ensor 2021, 29–39.

⁷⁰ Ensor 2021, 11.

⁷¹ Neumann and others 2019.

⁷² e.g., the use of 'brother' for symmetric relations outside the family, argued to be important among early Indo-European pastoral groups; see Olsen 2019; Neumann and others 2019; Sjögren and others 2020, 21.

⁷³ Helms 1998, 19, 59–69.

⁷⁴ Neumann and Glørstad 2022, 8.

⁷⁵ For an overview, see Gondal 2022.

⁷⁶ Kristiansen and others 2017 argued that migration remains a problematic area of study in archaeology because we lack a theoretical understanding of social institutions and their role in structuring material culture.

⁷⁷ Frei and others 2017. The 'age of marriageability' was defined from c. thirteen–fourteen by Frei and others 2017; and from c. sixteen by Knipper and others 2017. Olsen 2019 argued on a linguistic basis that the bride is by definition a travelling female.

⁷⁸ While bull-leapers with waistcloth in Greek art seem to be male, Egyptian art shows females in a waistcloth or skirt performing a bridge; see Iversen 2014, figs 4–6.

⁷⁹ Barber 1999; Yunyun 2019; Yang and others 2022 with references therein. Male Tarim mummies had waistcloths of similar make to the corded skirts of the females, but narrower.

⁸⁰ Barber 1999, 105.

⁸¹ e.g., Herbert 1984, 266.

puberty.⁸² The attribution of female gender around puberty has been argued to be the case also for the NBA.⁸³ Bergerbrant's overview of age-determined individuals buried in corded skirts shows that seven out of eight were juveniles or adults.⁸⁴ The one exception is a child from Trindhøj, at most six years old, buried 1347 BC with a corded skirt, an arm-ring, and small accessories of precious materials.⁸⁵ While this probably reflects a stepwise acquisition of gender-specific wealth, we cannot rule out that a premature death could have motivated the deposition of the skirt as attire related to an imagined future.⁸⁶ Hence this single example does not contradict the idea that corded skirts were in general associated with the social status that followed from sexual maturity. Older people are less well represented in the NBA burial record, but females older than forty are present and none of these are reported to wear corded skirts.⁸⁷ Furthermore, other evidence such as the occasional deposition of tubes/beads and quite possibly the corded skirts themselves, together with 'adult' jewellery sets,⁸⁸ may reflect a passage ritual connected to a shift in status related to, for example, menopause. I am therefore inclined to think that corded skirts in the Early Bronze Age had to do with a phase in life and not a more particular role or status. If the corded skirts were representative of Nordic juvenile and adult females, they probably say more about local custom and burial traditions, than exogamy. Skrydstrup, one of the few women buried in only a long skirt, is an immigrant young woman.⁸⁹

The available mobility studies from the NBA show that individuals of both sexes had travelled in and out of the region where they were buried during adolescence; and that some had moved at a younger age.⁹⁰ Despite this, female exogamy is often emphasized at the expense

of male exogamy, and while male fosterage is discussed as politico-strategic and educational, female fosterage tends — if at all — to be discussed in light of exogamy.⁹¹ The Egtved, Skrydstrup, and Ølby females; all of whom were honoured with primary burials in mounds, can hardly be differentiated as a group on the basis of their age and mobility pattern when compared to other, male individuals. Both Egtved and Skrydstrup died young in south-east Jutland, around the age of sixteen–eighteen, but their mobility patterns were dissimilar.⁹² Skrydstrup made one long-distance journey from her far-away birthplace in early adolescence (c. thirteen–fourteen) to settle in Jutland.⁹³ She was buried in a long skirt and with hair ornaments untypical of the NBA. Egtved travelled repeatedly during the last two years of her life, back to the area from where she migrated as a child.⁹⁴ Although a regional, or even local, mobility pattern has been launched as an alternative to the first sensational attribution of her childhood isotopes to the Black Forest, it seems clear that Egtved travelled repeatedly during her relatively short life.⁹⁵ Fostering is a possibility,⁹⁶ which could explain the untypical arm-band, which stands out from her otherwise Nordic burial gear.⁹⁷ The Ølby woman travelled away from her birthplace in early adolescence, but from somewhere within the local region of Zealand.⁹⁸ She was buried in an outfit more or less typical for NBA elite females; with a corded skirt, belt plate, and dagger, and significantly, beads of amber and blue glass which indicate access to trade networks.⁹⁹ Her age pattern compares to that of the male from Jelling Øst. He moved from a place outside present-day Denmark (excluding Bornholm) when he was eight–twelve years old, and was buried in south-east Jutland with a foreign pin.¹⁰⁰ Similarly, two males from Karlstrup in Zealand, one male from Jestrup

82 Fitzpatrick 2023, 70.

83 Kristiansen 2013, 766 argued that females received grown-up jewellery sets at fifteen–twenty years of age.

84 Bergerbrant 2014a, table 3. Based on this and estimates of life-length, Bergerbrant 2014a, 84 argued that women of all ages used corded skirts.

85 Fossey and Bergerbrant 2013, 27; Bergerbrant 2014a, 84. Burial C contained a skin, remains of a corded skirt, a bronze arm-ring, an amber bead, and a tin button. Age was estimated from the size of the coffin and arm-ring.

86 Argued to be the case with the child from Abbekås; see Bergerbrant 2014b.

87 Bergerbrant and others 2017, app. 2. Long skirts are documented in two burials: Skrydstrup, a young female, and Borum Eshøj, now re-identified as c. thirty years of age; according to Bergerbrant pers. comm.

88 Bergerbrant 2014a, table 2.

89 Bergerbrant 2007, 54–59; Frei and others 2017.

90 Isotopes indicate that both females and males moved at ages seven–sixteen; see Frei and others 2015; 2017; Reiter and others 2019; Felding and others 2020; Felding 2023.

91 Kristiansen 2023, 97–98, nurturing the idea of women as 'the ultimate gift', cf. Lévi-Strauss 1969. Female fostering was discussed by Bergerbrant 2014b; 2019c when it comes to the Abbekås girl, and more recently by Kristiansen 2023 regarding Egtved's companion, a cremated child. Childhood intraregional movement related to politically motivated fosterage is argued for a male from Højgård in Jutland; see Felding and others 2020; Felding 2023. Kristiansen 2023 hypothesized that the Karlstrup men were returned, Nordic-born foster-brothers.

92 Felding 2023.

93 Frei and others 2017.

94 Frei and others 2015.

95 See Frei and others 2020.

96 Felding 2023.

97 Bergerbrant 2019a argued that an origin in southern Sweden or Norway is more likely than the Black Forest.

98 Reiter and others 2019, 12. The dagger is a fragmented sword but does not signal a typical warrior identity; see Felding 2020, 440; Felding and Stott 2023, 143–44.

99 Kaul 2022.

100 Felding and others 2020.

and one from Nybøl, both Jutland, are all considered to be non-locals, having immigrated like Jelling Øst from areas outside Denmark. They were buried according to local custom when they died as adults, albeit the Jestrup male had a foreign sword.¹⁰¹ The idea that there were different social drivers behind juvenile male and female mobility; fosterage vs. marriage, is indeed persuasive, but does not seem to be bolstered by the archaeological evidence. Instead, the highly individualized patterns may reflect that there were various social drivers behind mobility, regardless of gender.¹⁰² Acknowledging this variability, fostering or patronage aimed at strategic positioning is now seen by a number of scholars as a plausible model for NBA females as well.¹⁰³

If a high degree of childhood and juvenile movement can be assumed for both genders, how can we sustain the theory of patrilocal female exogamy as the main norm in the NBA? How does the available isotope data from the NBA fit with Ensor's models? According to Ensor, male homogeneity and female heterogeneity is to be expected if a society practised patrilocal residence and female exogamy. A cognatic descent model with bi-local residence would produce a more heterogeneous isotope pattern.¹⁰⁴ Unfortunately, we lack high-resolution data from cemeteries with multiple burials, but judging from the individuals discussed here, there is large intra and inter-sex variation; in fact many non-locals are male. In a larger dataset from Denmark, an uptick in mobility with more varied origins is noted around 1600 BC, but any patterned behaviour related to gender was hard to find.¹⁰⁵ In another study, a significant number of early, cremated individuals were identified as not being local to Denmark, but no gender pattern was detected.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, larger datasets from southern Sweden show a lack of clear patterning when it comes to the sex of non-locals.¹⁰⁷ In my opinion, anticipating aDNA data and data from multiple burials, the currently available evidence is not likely to reflect a strictly patrilineal society, more likely a cognatic one. Significantly, the

fact that an equal number of men and women were the first to be buried in mounds in some regions, and that a higher proportion of females than men actually got prominent burials in others, can be taken to indicate that female lineages counted on equal terms. Moreover, the dual identities noted in both female and male burials could be indicative of a society where relations on both sides were kept active.

Marriage is, as already pointed out, an occasion for transactions of wealth.¹⁰⁸ Austvoll argued that a hypogamous marriage system, where one part is 'marrying down' could explain wealth aggregations in north-western Scandinavia.¹⁰⁹ This is an interesting proposal which must be researched further in its wider Nordic context, and in light of other forms of exchange between polities.¹¹⁰ An equally relevant issue is how rules for inheritance may have structured investment in burial monuments.¹¹¹ Another is the geographical extent of kinship systems in the Bronze Age world, including culturally situated ideas of what was considered 'local' and 'non-local'.¹¹² As pointed out by Ensor, the geographical distance between marriage partners relies on whether long-distance networking was a key strategy to the group in question, or not.¹¹³ A comprehensive approach to kinship in the NBA should also address settlement structure, following Ensor's idea that cognatic systems tend to produce dispersed settlement patterns, since social structure tends to be built around family groups.

Conclusion

I set out by asking whether the available evidence from the NBA actually supports the dominating theory of strict patrilocal female exogamy. I revisited a gendered garment with a long history of use and archaeological discussion; the corded skirt, and pursued the idea

101 Frei and others 2019, 15–16.

102 e.g., Frei and others 2019; Reiter and Frei 2019; Felding and others 2020, cf. Booth and others 2020, 391. Trade, transhumance, and other forms of seasonal movement are increasingly discussed.

103 Patronage or fosterage is now argued to explain Egtved's mobility pattern; see Felding 2023. Reiter and others 2023 argued for a similar interpretation of a female from Ginderup in Jutland.

104 Ensor 2021, 31, fig. 2.3 and 34, fig. 2.6.

105 Frei and others 2019.

106 Reiter and others 2021.

107 Bergerbrant and others 2017. Analyses on Late Neolithic–Early Bronze Age skeletons from gallery graves in Sweden suggest that child mobility was high, and an increase of females within the semi-local range compared to earlier parts of the Neolithic is noted; see Blank and others 2018, 24; 2021, 13, 17.

108 Through dowry or bride-price; see e.g., Sjögren and others 2020; Brück 2021; Kristiansen 2023, 97.

109 Austvoll 2021, 24, cf. Kristiansen 2023, 97.

110 Guest-friendship, commodity trade, warfare/looting, etc.; see Kristiansen 2023.

111 In New Kingdom Egypt, the right to inherit was linked to the obligation to sponsor a proper burial, and several females are reported to take this role; see Skumsnes 2022. In late Viking Age Scandinavia, memorial stones were frequently sponsored by women as part of an intricate system of inheritance; see Sawyer 2014.

112 While movement within the geographical region of the NBA, e.g., across the Skagerrak, could be conceived of as local, a move to the Black Forest area would perhaps not. In both cases, however, isotopes would come out as non-local when compared to Denmark; cf. Kristiansen 2023, 93–94.

113 Ensor 2021, 25–27.

that these skirts were ordinary garments related to a certain life stage. The point with this was not to suggest that biology is more determining for women, but to underline how biology tends to interact with the social. A key result to be drawn from recent research based on science-driven archaeology and network analysis is that female agency was a natural pendant to male agency and that women in some parts of the NBA could attain powerful positions on a par with men. Graves follow a binary pattern, but both females and males had access to burial wealth and primary positions. A cognatic descent model with two-sided exogamy seems better suited than any unilateral model of descent to explain

the variable mobility patterns and the strong evidence of female agency and access to status indicators, which is suggested by the NBA burial record. In conclusion, female out-marriage thus seems to have been only one of several available strategies for making kin.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Martin Furholt for literature tips, and Iver B. Neumann and Håkon Glørstad for comments on an earlier draft. My gratitude also goes to the anonymous reviewer and the editors.

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4. A Network of Girls

Marriage Alliances in Roman-Period Scandinavia

The Romans never conquered Scandinavia. Nevertheless, at the fringes of an expanding empire, Roman influence on Germanic societies, including their social structure, military organization, and material culture, was substantial. Throughout the Roman period (AD 1–400), Scandinavian communities became more hierarchical, complex, and unequal, but also more interconnected. As a result of increased long-distance contacts, small communities interacted in global networks, and new practices and materialities were widely disseminated. Local and regional centres of contact, influence, and power emerged and elite milieus evolved.¹ By the onset of the Roman period, the burial custom became increasingly diverse while the composition of grave-goods and the size of monuments expanded.² Some burials stand out as exceptionally well-equipped, indicating that some individuals had the ability to accumulate substantial wealth, and to cultivate and control local high-skilled crafts of jewellery, weapons, and pottery.³ Additionally, settlement patterns suggest changes in social structures. In present-day Norway, settlements became more diverse, and increasingly continuous.⁴ Huge hall buildings were erected, likely expressing the outstanding power of some families and their capability to arrange generous feasts and host large warrior bands.⁵ Furthermore, local production of iron was established⁶

Table 4.1. Periods and chronology applied in this text, following Hansen 1987.

	Early Roman period		Late Roman period			
Sub-period	B1	B2	C1a	C1b	C2	C3
Years AD	1–70	70– 150/160	150/160– 210/220	210/220– 250/260	250/260– 310/320	310/320– 400

and especially in Trøndelag, enormous quantities of iron were extracted from bogs, providing a firm basis for surplus production.⁷

Extensive use of prestigious objects characterizes the Roman period in Scandinavia. In particular, the Late Roman period (AD 150/160–400) saw a spiral of consumption of luxury items.⁸ Gold rings, precious brooches, and Roman imports were widely distributed, possibly indicating a culture of gift exchange, social competition, and alliance networks.⁹ The distribution of Roman imports reveals extensive networks of contacts and distribution of goods and services. Ulla Lund Hansen argues that given the limited types of objects, Roman imports were probably channelled and filtered through Zealand to Norway and Sweden.¹⁰ Therefore, the distribution of Roman imports in Norway suggests both long-distance relations between groups and the redistribution of prestigious objects through local networks.

Marriage alliances are often proposed as an explanation for the occurrence of foreign objects, especially dress-related ornaments, in prehistoric female burials.¹¹

¹ Hansen 1995; Reiersen 2017.

² e.g., Shetelig 1912; Hougen 1924; Hedeager 1990; Ethelberg 2000; Henriksen 2009.

³ e.g., Resi 1986; Straume 1987; 1988; Bemman and Hahne 1995; Resi 2005; Boye and others 2009; Skjødtt 2009; Fredriksen and others 2020.

⁴ Gjerpe 2023.

⁵ e.g., Bårdseth 2009; Østmo and Bauer 2018; see also Diinhoff 2011 and Ystgaard 2023 for a slightly different view.

⁶ Larsen 2009.

⁷ Prestvold 1999; Rundberget 2010.

⁸ Hedeager 1990, 142.

⁹ e.g., Hansen 1987; Straume 1988; Ethelberg 2000; Reiersen 2017.

¹⁰ Hansen 1987.

¹¹ See e.g., Straume 1988; Skjødtt 2009; Przybyła 2011.

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However, discussions about such individual migrations are usually limited to identifying extraneous items and their origin. Little attention is paid to how, what, or why such practices were undertaken beyond establishing alliances. Marriage is presented as a static frame for the movement of women as pawns in a game played by their fathers and husbands. The bride has no agency of her own, and there is no consideration of the impact she could have on the relationships she is supposed to create.¹²

The main objective of this study is thus to explore the circumstances of elite long-distance marriages in Roman-period Scandinavia. The aim is to understand how individual migrations of girls and women may have been part of diplomatic strategies to develop alliance networks. The study will compare the occurrence of prestigious brooches originating in Zealand with the distribution of Roman imports in Norway. This will enable an examination of whether and how marriages were incorporated into circles of exchange, and how these exchanges may have worked to negotiate, establish, and maintain Pan-Scandinavian alliance networks during the Roman period. The study will adopt a feminist approach and discuss how diplomatic strategies and networks of power might be gendered, and consider long-distance marriages from the girls' perspective.

Diplomacy, Gifts, and Alliances

Diplomacy refers to the strategies and methods employed by groups or states to safeguard their external interests without resorting to violence. The primary goal of diplomacy is to promote peaceful interaction between two or more parties by way of negotiation.¹³ Reciprocity is a key principle of diplomacy, but since diplomatic agreements involve compromises, they are subject to change by either party involved. As a result, relationships and agreements require frequent renewal.¹⁴ Central to this ongoing negotiation is the exchange of gifts and services.

Marcel Mauss's seminal work *The Gift* has been fundamental to our understanding of the significance of reciprocal exchanges and how such interactions create and reproduce social relations.¹⁵ The act of gift-giving implies a conception of reciprocity that is crucial to the mutual public recognition between human groups.¹⁶ All over the world, gifts are integral

to systems of reciprocity, where the honour of both the giver and recipient is at stake. The main rule is that every gift entails an obligation that must be returned at a specific time and in a specific manner. Gifts are always part of the larger system of circulating goods and transactions in the form of events, courtesies, humans, and rituals, which Mauss terms a system of total services. This system involves complementary parts and is contingent on mutual cooperation. Clans, objects, and marriages are intertwined in networks of rules, economic services, and intersecting political hierarchies, where relationships and responsibilities are always on a group level — tribes, clans, families — even though individuals, like a chief or a bride, may represent the collective.¹⁷

The system of total service is by no means a preliminary form of market exchange. Rather, it is primarily intended to maintain relationships through reciprocal recognition.¹⁸ 'The good offered is not considered something to be consumed but is presented as a mark of respect, as an expression of the desire to honour the existence and status of the other, and finally as testimony to an alliance.'¹⁹ As a basic glue that holds society together, gift exchange is a constitutive practice of diplomatic strategies.²⁰ We should, however, not underestimate how the potential to obtain prestigious and luxury objects might motivate the establishment of relationships and networks.

Marriage as Gifts

Claude Lévi-Strauss's studies on kinship and marriage demonstrate how marriages can be part of such systems of circulation and he argues that 'marriage is regarded everywhere as a particularly favourable occasion for the initiation or development of a cycle of exchanges.'²¹ Matrimonial alliances are, thus, the most significant and decisive form of relationship recognition between groups, established through ceremonial gift exchanges. However, although marriages are incorporated into circles of exchange, far from all societies practice a system of *quid pro quo*. On the contrary, cross-culturally, wife-givers are usually superior to wife-takers — in effect, women often marry down. Through marriage, asymmetrical relations between those who provide and those who receive sisters and daughters as wives might be confirmed or negotiated.²²

12 See Bergerbrant 2007, 118–20; Frieman and others 2019 for further discussions and examples.

13 Berridge 1995, 1.

14 Selbitschka 2020, 69.

15 Mauss 2002 [1950].

16 Hénaff 2013.

17 Mauss 2002 [1950]; Douglas 2002 [1990].

18 Hénaff 2010.

19 Hénaff 2010, 153.

20 Neumann 2021.

21 Lévi-Strauss 1969, 63.

22 Avruch 2002.

Both Mauss's and Levi-Strauss's perspectives are clearly androcentric,²³ as pointed out already by Simone de Beauvoir.²⁴ She notes that throughout the study, relations are developed, and exchanges made between men, while women are viewed as commodities and 'the other'. Levi-Strauss explicitly states that 'the woman herself is nothing other than one of these gifts, the supreme gift among those that can only be obtained in the form of reciprocal gifts',²⁵ and that 'the relationship of reciprocity which is the basis of marriage is not established between men and women, but between men by means of women, who are merely the occasion of this relationship'.²⁶ In Levi-Strauss's view, women are consistently utilized as mediating objects for the benefit of male identity and power, without any will or impact of their own.²⁷

Revisiting some of the societies upon which Mauss and Levi-Strauss based their discussions has provided new insights into the roles and status of women. In particular, feminist research into kinship has revealed that the diagrams described by, among others, Levi-Strauss are idealized and disregard the complexity in decision-making and politics underlying the choice of marriage partner.²⁸ Annette Weiner's study of the Trobriand society shows that women are active participants in marriage and bring their own worth and integrity to the arrangement.²⁹ In marriage, women expand their socio-economic power not only through their production and distribution of wealth, and their ability to conceive, but also by exerting control over the regeneration of the identity of their origin.³⁰ While men do form social relationships with other men through marriage, they also do so with women. Weiner stresses that the relationship between sisters and brothers is of great importance in the power structures of hierarchical societies.³¹

Material Basis

The material basis for this study are Roman imports in general and two types of brooches in particular. Imported Roman goods from the entire Roman period have been found unevenly distributed throughout southern

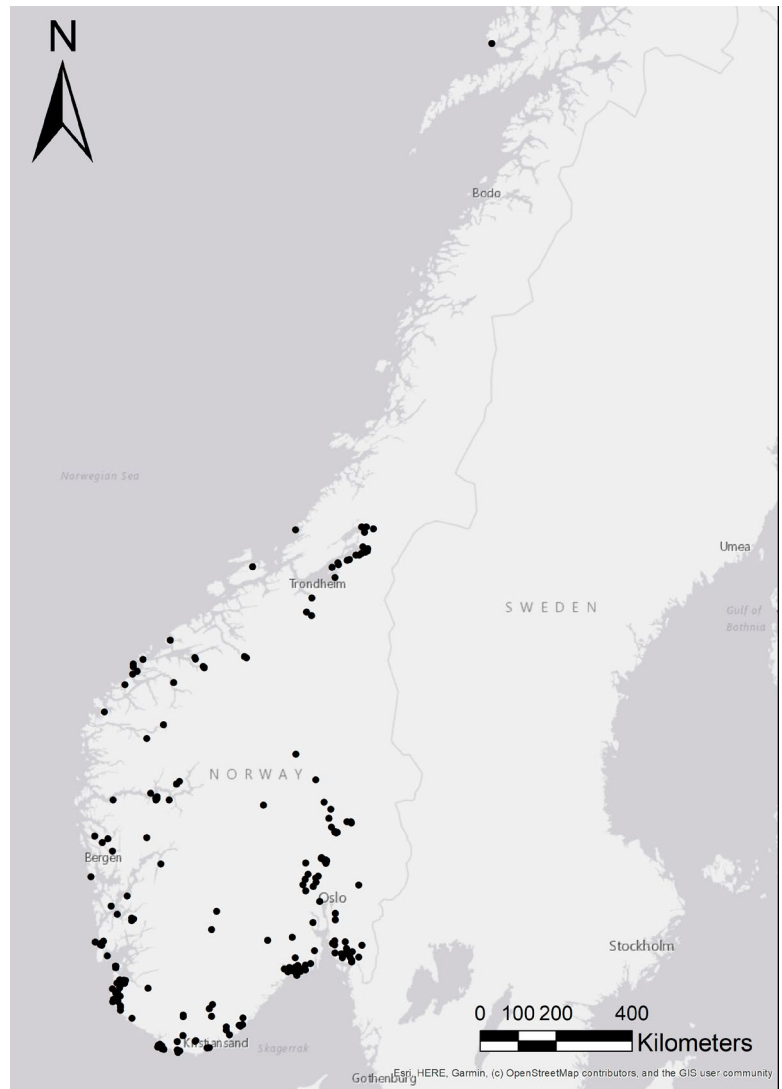


Figure 4.1. The distribution of Roman imports from the Roman period in Norway. Based on the catalogue of Hansen 1987.

and mid-Norway (Fig. 4.1). The repertoire is limited and standardized, primarily related to drinking and eating, such as bronze kettles and bowls, glass vessels, and rarer items like sieves and bailers. Most of these objects were mass-produced in the Roman provinces and distributed via Germania Libra and Denmark to Norwegian areas, although direct contacts might have occurred, especially in period C3. Their circulation period was generally short, and all types of Roman objects are mainly found in burial contexts.³²

By the onset of the Roman period, a new fashion, which involved clothing fastened and secured by small,

23 As well as colonialist and ethnocentric, but that is partly another discussion, see e.g., Joy 1999.

24 de Beauvoir 2015 [1949].

25 Lévi-Strauss 1969, 65.

26 Lévi-Strauss 1969, 116.

27 Weiner 1992, 12; Mussett 2015, 53.

28 Frieman and others 2019, 157.

29 Weiner 1976; Joy 2013, 13.

30 Weiner 1976, 230–34.

31 Weiner 1992, 16.

32 Hansen 1987.

Table 4.2. Rosette brooches and swastika brooches found in Norway. Catalogue numbers refer to the Unimus databases <<https://www.unimus.no/portal/#/>>. Site-ID refers to the Askeladden databases <<https://www.kulturminnesok.no/>> [accessed 1 December 2024].

Cat.no	Type	Material	Farm name	Site-ID	Municipality	County
C7773	Rosette brooch	Silver	Bringsvær	33159	Grimstad	Agder
C12229	Rosette brooch	Silver, gold	Rør Nordre		Moss	Østfold
C8212	Rosette brooch	Silver	Bringsvær	33159	Grimstad	Agder
C21352	Rosette brooch	Silver/bronze	Hamre Nedre		Vang	Oppland
C21352	Rosette brooch	Silver	Hamre Nedre		Vang	Oppland
S3196	Rosette brooch	Silver, gold	Vårå		Karmøy	Rogaland
T471	Rosette brooch	Silver, gold	Gjete		Levanger	Trøndelag
C63460	Rosette brooch	Silver	Hvål Mellem	224874	Sandefjord	Vestfold
C10003	Swastika brooch	Bronze	Gangså	42549	Lindesnes	Agder
C25200	Swastika brooch	Bronze	Lunde, nedre	159593	Nordre Land	Oppland
C5877	Swastika brooch	Bronze	Aak	113223	Rauma	Møre og Romsdal
T7292	Swastika brooch	Bronze	Tommeide		Nesna	Nordland
EG57	Swastika brooch	Bronze	Vestby-Evang		Østre Toten	Oppland
T586	Swastika brooch	Bronze	Hallem		Verdalen	Trøndelag

decorated brooches, gained popularity.³³ The brooches had some common characteristics but were locally produced and developed into a wide variety of forms. Although brooches are occasionally found in male burials, they mainly belonged to female costume. Not all women had the right or opportunity to obtain such items, and among those who did, brooches could be an effective way to communicate differences in social status and identity.³⁴

Some brooches were rare and extraordinarily luxurious. When context is sufficiently documented, they are always found in the richest of well-equipped women's burials, frequently in combination with Roman imports. Two such types are rosette and swastika brooches (Fig. 4.2) which were produced for a short period of time and in a limited number of workshops. Wearing such items may have been restricted to members of the uppermost elite, or even just one or two family groups.³⁵ These brooch types are chosen for this study because they are related to the elite, have a limited area of origin and time of production, making them suitable for exploring the long-distance movement of elite women.

Rosette Brooches

Rosette brooches are large fibulae made of bronze or silver with a high catch plate and adorned with gold embossed rosettes and occasionally inlaid pieces of

glass (Fig. 4.2, left).³⁶ They are complex constructions, consisting of forty to sixty individual pieces, which may explain their often fragmented state in the archaeological record. Rosette brooches are dated to C1b, which spanned only thirty to fifty years, AD 210/200–250/260.

Rosette brooches are mainly found in Denmark, but also occur in Norway, Sweden, northern Germany, the Baltic countries, and as far east as the Black Sea. Annagrete Skjødtt³⁷ lists sixty brooches in Denmark, which are concentrated in the Limfjord area, southern Jutland, Funen, and Zealand. In Norway, eight rosette brooches are known, primarily in the coastal areas from Østfold to Karmøy, however examples are also known from Valdres and northern Trøndelag (Table 4.2, Fig. 4.2).³⁸ All but one of the brooches found in Norway derive from known burials, while one was discovered during recent metal-detecting activity (C63460).

It has been suggested that all rosette brooches originate in Zealand,³⁹ but based on the analyses of modes of production and material components, Skjødtt argues that they most likely derive from three or four different workshops and that at least two of them were located on Jutland.⁴⁰ She also shows that eastern brooches are made of silver and cast in one piece, while western brooches are made of copper alloys, with the bow and catch plate

³³ See Almgren 1923.

³⁴ Hedeager 1990, 143; Ethelberg 2000; Resi 2005; Skjødtt 2009; Przybyła 2011; Østmo 2020.

³⁵ Straume 1988; Ethelberg 2000; Skjødtt 2009; Przybyła 2009; 2011.

³⁶ Montelius 1895, no. 320; Almgren 1923, gr.VII; Mackeprang 1943, taf. 1:6; Rygh 1999 [1885], fig. 236.

³⁷ Skjødtt 2009.

³⁸ Straume 1988; Ethelberg 2000; Przybyła 2011; Unimus databases: <<https://www.unimus.no/portal/#/>> [accessed 1 December 2024].

³⁹ e.g., Hansen 1995; Ethelberg 2000.

⁴⁰ Skjødtt 2009, 171.

usually cast separately. This east/west divergence in manufacture is distinguishable even on poorly preserved items. The rosette brooches found in Norway are all made of silver, but not well preserved. However, the characteristic shape of the bow, and the occurrence of rosettes, still make them unmistakably recognizable. Despite the possibility of copper-alloy rosette brooches being manufactured in Jutland, they appear not to have reached Norway.

Swastika Brooches

Swastika brooches are large and swastika-shaped, made in bronze and ornamented with embossed foil (Fig. 4.2, right).⁴¹ Their construction is complicated, with a round disc in the middle from which four, and sometimes five, curved arms are swung. Each arm is decorated by small knobs and foliated with gold or silver.

Swastika brooches have their origin in Zealand, Denmark. Although they first appeared in C1b, most date to the late C2 and C3, around AD 300–400.⁴² As of 2009, only thirty-one specimens were known, of which six were found in burials in Norway.⁴³ They occur in a limited variety of forms, and all except one of the brooches found in Norway are of the Høigård type with four arms, dated to late C2–C3 (AD 300–400).⁴⁴ The exception is the brooch from Åk (C5877, see Fig. 4.2, right), which has five arms and is dated to around AD 400. Swastika brooches are even more widely distributed than the rosette brooches (Fig. 4.2 and Table 4.2). All have been found in burials, most of which are poorly preserved. All are made of bronze, have at least one of the characteristically swung arms in place, and some still have the remains of gold foil.

Unpacking the Puzzle – Brooch Patterns

As all the rosette brooches found in Norway are made of silver, they probably originated in Zealand,⁴⁵ like the swastika brooches.⁴⁶ Figure 4.2 illustrates the relationships between Zealand and different parts of Norway, and indicates how both types of brooch are broadly but sporadically dispersed. With the exception of two rosette brooches from the same grave at Hamre nedre in Oppland (C21352) and two from the same cemetery at Bringsvær in Agder (C7773, C8212), they are all found

at a distance from each other. Furthermore, the map reveals that rosette brooches and swastika brooches do not occur in the same areas, with the only exception being Trøndelag, where a rosette brooch (T471) is found only 30 km from a swastika brooch (T586).

Comparing the occurrence of these brooches with the regional distribution of Roman imports creates an interesting pattern. All but two brooches (C21352, T7292) are found in areas where Roman imports are noticeably present. However, the distribution of the Roman objects diverges over time. While the rosette brooches are associated with Roman imports from the Early Roman period and particularly C1, the swastika brooches occur in areas with Roman imports primarily dated later to C2–C3 (Fig. 4.3).

This pattern is especially obvious when comparing the distribution and dating of Roman imports in Østfold, Agder and Møre and Romsdal (Fig. 4.2). In Østfold, a rosette brooch was found at Rygge, and the Roman imports in the nearby areas are mostly dated to B2 (AD 70–150/160) and C1 (AD 150/160–210/220). Only two Roman objects are from C3 (Fig. 4.2: 1). In contrast, in Romsdal, the swastika brooch found at Aak is accompanied by numerous Roman items along the coast from C2 (AD 210/220–310/320) and C3 (AD 310/320–400) (Fig. 4.2: 3) but only one from the Early Roman period. A similar pattern is repeated in Agder, where the earliest finds of Roman imports are clustered in the east, along with two rosette brooches, while later imports are concentrated in the west, as is a swastika brooch (Fig. 4.2: 2).⁴⁷

This correspondence might be confirmed by the situation in Trøndelag, where both a rosette brooch and a swastika brooch have been found along with equal shares of Roman imports from the Early and Late Roman period. In Rogaland, the spectacular burial at Avaldsnes,⁴⁸ with a number of Roman objects dated to C1b, along with some items from B2 or C1, support an association between Roman imports and rosette brooches (S3196). However, the majority of Roman finds at Karmøy and Jæren are from C2–C3, which implies, based upon the pattern noted above, that an as yet undiscovered swastika brooch could be located here. Less clear are the connections for the swastika brooches at Toten (EG57) and Fagernes (C25200) but contemporary Roman imports are found in both regions.⁴⁹

This limited analysis of the spatial distribution of foreign brooches and Roman imports over time shows that Roman objects generally appear prior to and contemporaneously with the brooches. Further observations are that the

41 Almgren 1923, taf. X; Mackeprang 1943, taf. 3:8; Rygh 1999 [1885], fig. 238.

42 Hansen 1995, 215.

43 Przybyła 2009.

44 Przybyła 2009, 37.

45 Skjødt 2009.

46 Przybyła 2009.

47 See Hansen 1987 for dating of Roman imports in Norway.

48 Reiersen and Stylegar 2017.

49 Hansen 1987.

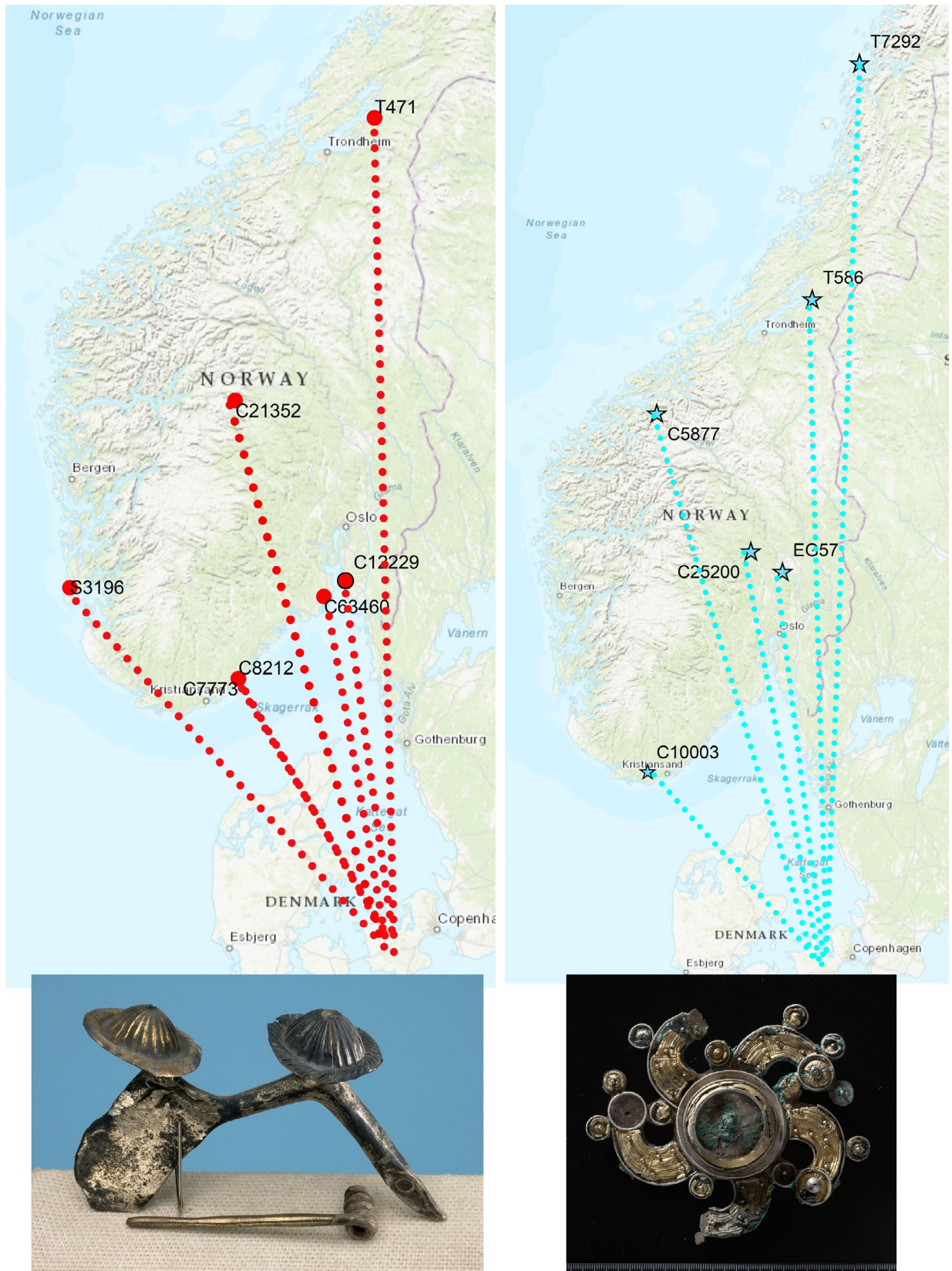


Figure 4.2. The distribution and origin of rosette brooches, exemplified by T471 from Geite, Trøndelag to the left and swastika brooches, exemplified by C5877 from Aak, Møre and Romsdal to the right. Photo: Per E. Fredriksen, © NTNU Vitenskapsmuseet and Kirsten Helgeland, Museum of Cultural History, CC BY-SA 4.0.

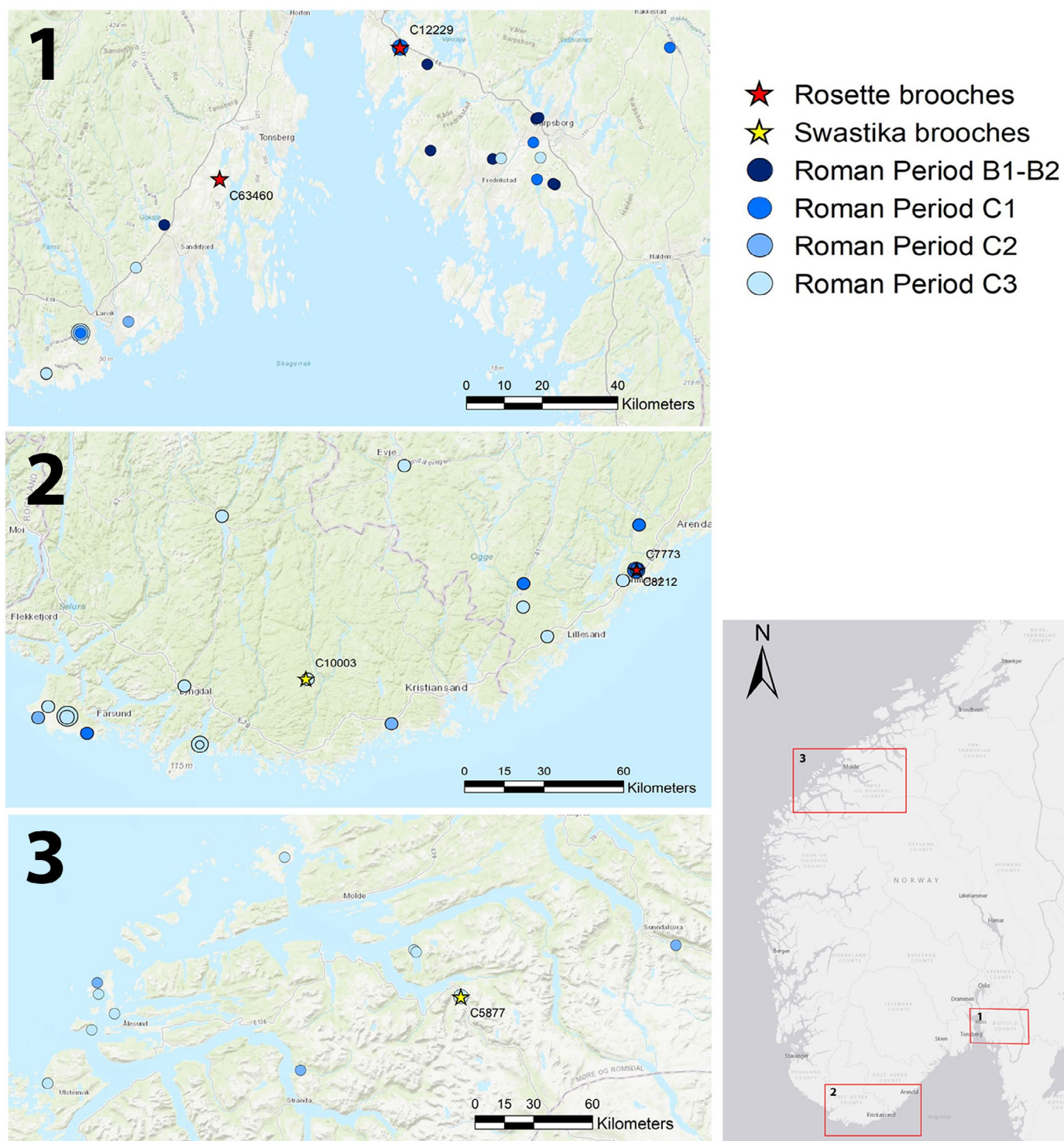


Figure 4.3. Distribution maps illustrating the relationships between Roman imports from various phases and rosette brooches and swastika brooches in 1) Østfold, 2) Agder, and 3) Møre and Romsdal. Maps by author.

brooches are scattered over a vast area, and that rosette and swastika brooches do not occur in the same regions.

Gift Exchange in Germanic Societies

Based on Roman law texts, contemporary sources referring to Germanic societies, Norse texts, and linguistic discussions, Mauss uses Iron Age Germanic societies as a case study for gift exchange.⁵⁰ From this, he claims that they were characterized by a system of gift exchange taken to the extreme. He stresses how things themselves were regarded as having inherent power and forming part of the family. This is especially noticeable in the earliest Roman sources, where everything that belongs to the house — things, animals, and people — belongs to the family. If things are given to others, they still, in part and for a time, belong to the family of the original owner. They remain bound to him/her and binds the present possessor until he/she is freed through the compensatory handing over of things or services that, in turn, will bind the initial contracting party. In the Germanic societies, interactions between families, clans, and tribes outside the closed confines of the family group, were accomplished, 'by the form of the gift and the alliances, by pledges and hostages, by feasts and presents that were as generous as possible'.⁵¹ By continuously exchanging gifts, they communicated, helped, and allied themselves to each other. However, Mauss does not assess the relevance of Roman law texts to Germanic societies, nor does he consider source-critical aspects of applying Tacitus or phrases from the considerably later *Hávamál* as sources of Germanic culture. As a result, he creates an image of Germanic societies as static and coherent, which is likely far from reality.

The Roman historian Caius Cornelius Tacitus (AD 56–120) emphasizes that in Germanic societies it is the husband who brings a dowry.⁵² He may present the bride's family with cattle, bridled horses, and weapons, and the gifts are presented publicly and judged by her parents and kin. By openly presenting the gifts, without any secrecy, making them available for public estimation and judgements of fairness, the balance between giver and receiver is known to all.⁵³ Tacitus praises the high morals among Germanic people, and contrasts their traditions with what he considers corrupt in his contemporary Roman state. However,

his approval of Germanic men taking only one wife and their preference for useful gifts rather than bling should perhaps be taken with a pinch of salt. Nevertheless, his descriptions of structures of exchange related to marriage do follow the logic of Mauss's total system. As Mauss bases some of his arguments on Roman law texts and Roman accounts of Germanic societies, there is a risk of circular reasoning. Still, Mauss's and Levi-Strauss's works provide broad cross-cultural analysis that contextualizes Germanic customs within a common repertoire of practices concerning relations of reciprocity, reflecting some universal human social mechanisms.

Fluctuations in Roman imports to Norway during the Early Roman period and C1 (AD 1–250/260) generally follow similar trajectories to Denmark, in terms of types of object and relative quantities.⁵⁴ Therefore, the increased quantity of imported items from B2 to C1 may indicate intensified interactions between the areas, but it could also reflect the overall growing number of Roman objects in circulation. Nonetheless, this parallel development suggests close contacts between groups in Norway and Zealand in particular. During B2, these connections underwent a transformation, with the exchange of prestigious gifts becoming an important aspect of long-distance relations.⁵⁵ In C2 and especially C3, the relative number of Roman objects declined in Denmark, and Zealand appears to lose some of its filtering function in the distribution of Roman imports to Norway and Sweden.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, Roman vessels and glasses become more numerous and widespread in Norway, and their expanding distribution in remote fjords and valleys does not necessarily reflect direct contacts between every local region and Denmark. Instead, this distribution may demonstrate how these objects were redistributed through local networks, creating new or reinforcing existing systems of total services and diplomatic relations within and between regions.

Gift exchange is not the sole means by which precious goods could arrive and be distributed in Norway. War booty, theft, personal belongings of immigrants, and particularly in C2–C3, certain forms of trade⁵⁷ may also have brought prestigious foreign items northwards. However, the limited selection of luxurious types of objects, with a preference for objects connected with drinking, and the corresponding absence of more ordinary Roman goods, suggest that Roman imports to Norway were primarily associated with exchanges performed in connection with common but specific

⁵⁰ Mauss 2002 [1950], 63–64, 77, among them Tacitus's *Germania* and *Hávamál*.

⁵¹ Mauss 2002 [1950], 77.

⁵² Tac., *Germ.*, XVIII.

⁵³ See Douglas 2002 [1990], xviii.

⁵⁴ Hansen 1987.

⁵⁵ Hansen 1987, 256–57.

⁵⁶ Hansen 1987, 260.

⁵⁷ Eggers 1951; Hedeager 1988; Grane 2007.

practices, rather than individual trade or random theft.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the fact that Roman imports were never replicated locally, either in Denmark or in Norway, indicates that the origin of these objects held intrinsic value. The possession of Roman items could thus have signified the owner's connections to and knowledge of foreign traditions, and the drinking equipment embodied⁵⁹ a cultural capital⁶⁰ that could neither be purchased nor stolen.

The Roman imports to Norway may therefore mainly reflect relationships built by gift exchange, primarily with groups on Zealand, but in C2–C3 increasingly locally oriented. Should the precious brooches be considered differently?

Girls and Brooches on the Move

Access to prestigious objects is by its very definition restricted.⁶¹ Through repeated association, certain things might be symbolically identified with specific groups and are, 'imbued with the intrinsic and ineffable identities of their owners.'⁶² As such, they are inalienable possessions that may be kept by their holders from one generation to the next. Luxurious and prestigious objects are empowered to act as the source of difference and hierarchy. They represent how social identities are reconstituted through time and legitimize the creation of an elite. Even the reproduction of kinship might be legitimated in each generation through the transmission of inalienable possessions.⁶³

While the Roman imports were kept but redistributed within the upper strata of society, the rosette and swastika brooches were restricted to an even more exclusive group. Only the most well-equipped women's burials contain such rare items. Differing from bronze vessels, brooches are visual elements of the individual dress which constitute the social surface of the body. Clothing communicates various aspects of individual and collective status and identity, like gender, age, position, origin, or more subtle messages, and may be perceived as repeated social practice which produces and is structured by meaning. Through the dress and its ornamentation, social personae and categories are communicated and thereby differences are constructed, maintained, and negotiated.⁶⁴

Due to the close association between brooches and individual members of certain families, these objects may well have been considered inalienable possessions that could not be handed out as gifts. Therefore, when brooches are found outside their areas of origin, they reveal the movement of the owner, not just the brooch. However, grave-goods are not merely passive reflections of social structures or identities, and their meaning in burial contexts may be ambiguous and communicate on multiple levels.⁶⁵ We may expect that brooches could also be inherited within the family, such as from mother to daughter. Two particular circumstances indicate that the mobility of the brooches and their bearers was linked to long-distance marriages. Firstly, the presence of rosette/swastika brooches in burials suggests that they were important symbols in life, worn by women whose kinship with the uppermost elite on Zealand was crucial to articulate. This association would mainly have value if she also served as a link to the local elite — which she could do through a marriage that united the two families. Then the brooch would not only communicate her origin but also signify that the local group, through her, was part of a powerful family on Zealand. Secondly, while Roman imports are found in uneven clusters in certain areas (Fig. 4.1),⁶⁶ the distribution of rosette/swastika brooches in Norway appears to be deliberately organized, as if someone strategically and intentionally placed them at a carefully calculated distance from each other (see Fig. 4.2). The distribution pattern suggests a conscious strategy of establishing nodes of contacts within an extensive network covering the southern half of Norway. These nodes, represented by brooches, indicate the presence of elite women who migrated from Zealand. This would have been an effective strategy to maintain alliances and form widespread kinship connections, generating powerful networks of influence and loyalty through family members, ultimately creating a dynasty.⁶⁷

Giving precious gifts that the receiver cannot properly return would create asymmetrical relationships in terms of power. Tacitus writes that cattle, horses, and weapons were popular commodities among Germanic people, and white fur and iron might have been appreciated gifts from the Norwegian area, although such objects are more difficult to identify than Roman objects. Still, the relatively small quantities of Roman imports found in Norway, suggest that the power relations between the elites in Norway and Denmark were unequal. Additionally, while the rosette and swastika brooches

58 Hansen 1987, 257, 262; Hedeager 1988, 118.

59 Hedeager 1990, 134.

60 Bourdieu 1995.

61 e.g., Bourdieu 1995.

62 Weiner 1992, 6.

63 Hedeager 1990, 143; Weiner 1992, 10–11; see also Vedeler 2018.

64 Røstad 2021, 29–30; see also Sørensen 2000, 126–28; Reiersen 2018, 48–49; Røstad (this volume).

65 See e.g., Härke 1997; 2014; Parker Pearson 1999; Brück 2004; Ekengren 2006 for more elaborate discussions.

66 Hansen 1987.

67 See also Hedeager 1990, 133.

may represent women who moved from Zealand to different parts of Norway, there are few indications of movement in the opposite direction in the Late Roman period. It is possible that we are unable to identify such migrations as we do not know what would distinguish them, but the lack of specific 'Norwegian' symbols could mirror a cultural hierarchy where Continental signifiers were held in higher esteem. It appears that the elites at Zealand were primarily wife-givers, while groups in Norway were wife-receivers, reinforcing an asymmetric relationship.⁶⁸

The numerous weapon deposits from the Roman period in Denmark testify to a time of frequent armed conflicts involving large warrior bands and even armies.⁶⁹ Personal equipment found in the Illerup hoard indicates that some of the defeated warriors came from Norway.⁷⁰ These finds suggest that security policy was a crucial motivation behind the large investments in gift exchanges and strategic geographical arrangements of elite marriages. The most desired return service may have been loyalty and potentially military support. Stabilizing the situation, securing allies, and pre-empting potential conflicts through diplomatic means were likely imperative for gaining and maintaining positions of power.

Networks of Powerful Girls

Mimi Sheller points out that 'women are often defined as lacking a "mobile subjectivity", being rooted in place and home, while narratives of masculine becoming often hinge on travel, hitting the road, and escape from home'.⁷¹ Women are not subjects that can *do*, only objects which are *done to*.⁷² The preceding analysis and discussions demonstrate that women were moving over long distances, from Zealand to Østfold, Trøndelag, and even Nordland, covering distances of up to 1000 km. These journeys took several weeks or months, and were made by boat, on horseback, and on foot, requiring careful preparation and planning by the giving as well as the receiving group. It is reasonable to assume that the girls took an active part in these preparations, experienced an adventure, and were primed for a position of significant power.

In most cases, Roman imports precede the rosette/swastika brooches, suggesting that gift exchange relationships had already been established between groups

in different parts of Norway and Zealand in advance of marriages at elite level. These marriages were not made to create relationships but rather outcomes of long-standing contacts and continuous circles of exchange. The girl to be married did not travel into unknown territory, and terms, conditions, and long-term interests in the arrangement must have been negotiated and agreed upon, probably by senior members of her and his family, such as his mother, her maternal uncle, etc.⁷³

The mixture of imported and local objects found in the 'brooch-burials', e.g., at Rør,⁷⁴ suggests that the women were integrated into the local society. Still, the presence of the rosette/swastika brooch indicates that she remained a member of and represented her family of origin, even in her death. It is likely that exchanges of services and gifts continued throughout the marriage to keep the circle going and to negotiate and consolidate the ties within and between the groups, as demonstrated by Lévi-Strauss.⁷⁵ The apparent strategic distribution of 'brooch-girls' may reflect that they held a crucial role in negotiating and maintaining relationships and alliances. Historical studies reveal that women born into aristocratic circles in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were trained to actively participate in negotiations between noble families and were expected to perform diplomatic tasks right from the early stages of marriage.⁷⁶ Women involved in marital alliances were thus not merely supreme gifts akin to prestigious objects. Although the value of their movements was substantial within the system of total service, individual migrations of elite women also introduced an outsider with an agency of her own into a local community. She brought with her a perspective from outside, acquaintance with foreign areas and people, and loyalty to another family group. She could serve as the main contact between groups, have a direct impact on negotiations, and introduce new knowledge and skills related to craft, rituals, and leadership. Through her children she had the potential to unite the two family groups in the past, present, and future. Accordingly, these women served as central hubs in extensive networks, enabling them to wield considerable power and influence in making important community decisions.⁷⁷

While the rosette brooches and their owners probably arrived in Norway within a relatively short time span of two to three generations, the dating of the swastika brooches is less precise. However, it is

68 Avruch 2002.

69 e.g., Engelhardt 1970; Jørgensen and others 2003; Løvschal and others 2019.

70 Ilkjær 2000.

71 Sheller 2008, 258.

72 Frieman and others 2019, 163.

73 See Tac., *Germ.*, XX.2; Frieman and others 2019, 157.

74 Straume 1988; see also Røstad 2021, 255–61.

75 Lévi-Strauss 1969, 65.

76 Sluga and James 2016.

77 See Lund and others 2022 for a broader discussion on power.

noticeable that, with the exception of Trøndelag, the two brooch types are never found close to each other (see Fig. 4.2). While all known rosette brooches may be associated with large cemeteries, monumental mounds, and numerous Roman-period finds in nearby areas, and thus most likely with centres of power, some of the swastika brooches are located in more remote areas and are less spatially related to Roman imports.

This change seems to correlate with the wider dispersal of Roman imports that occurs in Norway in period C2–C3, which suggests a more complex situation where Zealand lost some of its previous monopoly of power.⁷⁸ Moreover, the wider distribution of prestigious objects also likely reflects the consolidation of elites who had secured their position at the local level.⁷⁹ More varied contacts were established towards Jutland and Sweden, as well as regional and local networks and circles of exchange.⁸⁰ The importance of the direct link to Zealand appears to have weakened, and accordingly, not all swastika brooches may necessarily represent the initial movement of people. Rather, some might have been inherited, along with the status that the brooch signified, within the family group, possibly from a mother to a daughter who moved for the same purpose but within a more local context and over shorter distances than her mother — or grandmother — did. Especially more isolated findings, such as T7292 at Tommeide (see Fig. 4.2, uppermost to the right), an area where no Roman imports, except for two Roman silver coins (Marcus Aurelius denars, T27352, T27353), or other prestigious imported objects are known, may thus represent more locally oriented networks, perhaps extending to Trøndelag, rather than close contacts with Zealand. Further studies are needed to fully appreciate the distribution of swastika brooches, but it appears that the Continental diplomatic strategy of using elite marriages to negotiate and sustain networks and alliances was transferred to and pursued in more local contexts throughout the Late Roman period.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined how elite-level marriages may have been applied as a diplomatic strategy in Roman-period Scandinavia. Inspired by Roman diplomacy but primarily based on Germanic traditions

of extensive gift exchange, aristocratic families in Zealand systematically worked to develop, negotiate, and maintain widespread networks of alliances — northwards. Relations between elite groups were well established through gift exchanges before marriages on the uppermost level were arranged. Girls and women travelled long distances to enter into marriage, and their strategically chosen geographical locations indicate that they played a crucial role in exerting influence through these networks. In all probability, they aimed to found a Pan-Scandinavian dynasty, where alliances were built and sustained by creating kinship ties through the maternal line and establishing channels of direct influence into other communities.

This study has barely scratched the surface of how contacts, networks, and alliances were formed and sustained. In pre-state societies with unstable institutions, agreements are volatile. Stable alliances cannot be upheld by diplomatic gift exchanges and marriages alone, but are also based on other means like fostering, hostage taking, and threats, interrupted by violent attacks, warfare, and surrender. The occurrence of foreign objects in male burials should thus be included in this discussion, without the immediate assumption that they indicate powerful individuals travelling abroad and bringing prestigious items home.⁸¹ Moreover, other possibilities than marriage should also be explored to understand female mobility in prehistory. Studies of gendered migration in our contemporary world reveal that globally, women are just as mobile as men. However, women and men move for different reasons and often independently of each other.⁸² We should assume that mobility was just as complex and varied in prehistory.

The preceding analysis only reveals the networks signified by rosette and swastika brooches. Other types of brooches and jewellery may reflect corresponding movements of other women⁸³ and the presence of prestigious objects such as silver-plated weapons and snake-headed gold rings occasionally found in some men's burials⁸⁴ could complement these distribution patterns, providing a better understanding of how alliance networks were developed. Marriageable girls were not just precious commodities to be exchanged between men. By exploring how women wielded power through these networks, we might gain novel insights into power dynamics and the intricate ways that societies interact with one another.

⁷⁸ See Hedeager 1990; Hansen 1995; Boye and others 2009.

⁷⁹ Hedeager 1990, 135.

⁸⁰ Hansen 1987; Fredriksen and others 2020.

⁸¹ Frieman and others 2019; Lund and others 2022.

⁸² Christou and Kofman 2022.

⁸³ See e.g., Ethelberg 2000; Przybyła 2011; Østmo 2020.

⁸⁴ Magnus 2002; Stylegar 2008; Reiersen 2017.

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5. 'Body, Doorway that You Are'*

Gendering in Fourth- to Sixth-Century AD Voss and Hardanger

Studying women of the past compels a fundamental question: what is a woman? If we are to forego the idea that being a woman, or being any gender, is a universal and transhistorical experience, then it is necessary to destabilize any assumptions about what gender is.¹ With the aim of shedding notions of gender as culturally and historically neutral identity systems, in this chapter I aim to show how gender emerges materially through relational processes, and how, through this understanding, articulation of genders cannot simply be understood through the qualitative identification of stable categories. Instead, identity should be understood through difference between groups within a specific set of data, as well as processes of *becoming* within these differential groups that act in tandem with other social changes in a given society.

Burials are a crucial source on how gender is interpreted in the early Scandinavian Iron Age. Bodies, how they are presented, and the artefacts they are left with have been the subject of broad academic literature.² However, the foundations on which these interpretations sit have long been overdue for reconsideration: namely, the mechanisms by which archaeologists categorize them, and the unchallenged assumptions that follow of how gender may be articulated within burials. The gender binary is a foundational axis on which the contemporary Western world understands the self

and those of others.³ In a research tradition such as is being discussed here, concerning and primarily being conducted in the West, it has long been treated as a universal basis of human experience. Whether a given burial is of a man or a woman is typically among the first questions asked in an excavation, and as such is also the foundation on which many other interpretations are based. Historically and cross-culturally, it has been attested numerous times that the concept of the gender binary is *not* universal, and, further, that neither is what it means to be a woman, or a man. Different societies have different ways of relating to gender, how it is categorized, and how gender intersects with other social and cultural roles and practices.⁴ This forces those of us who are modern Western scholars to acknowledge that a similar statement could be made of the foreign cultures of the past.⁵ They are not us, and they are not like us. The bodies they have left behind are foreign.

I aim to challenge the assumptions outlined above regarding the gender binary by reworking the mechanism for determining gender in burials, to examine how particular gendered identities relate to each other. To achieve this, I use statistical modelling of differences in artefact composition between burials from the fourth to sixth centuries AD in western Norway.⁶ The multivariate statistical method *cluster analysis* is used, which groups burials based on similarities and differences in their

* This research was supported by the BODY-POLITICS project, funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement no. 949886).

1 See Conkey and Spector 1984; Alberti 2005; Moen 2019b; for arguments that support this claim within the context of archaeology, which this paper hinges on.

2 See, for instance, Kristoffersen 2000; Hanisch 2001; Myhre 2005; Fredriksen 2006a; 2010; Mansrud 2008.

3 Jenkins 2004; Butler 2007.

4 Examples of gender categories outside of the male/female dichotomy include the Native American two-spirit, see Pilling 1997; Hollimon 2006; Levy 2006, 224, the Samoan *fa'afafine*, see Schmidt 2003, the Native Hawai'ian and Tahitian *māhū*, see Zanghellini 2013, and the hijras of the Indian subcontinent, see Kalra and Shah 2013.

5 See also Laqueur 1992.

6 Aslesen 2020.

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artefact compositions. I have, through this, found a number of interesting patterns, following findings from earlier studies. These findings demonstrate a number of interconnected groupings in burial practice. In this text, I will primarily focus on the three groups found to be most pronounced, and how they relate to each other.⁷ Namely, a group of burials characterized by the inclusion of textile- and leather-making tools, typically interpreted as female, burials with weapon sets, typically interpreted as male, and a third group, burials with bear claws, which may be indicative of another clearly delineated, shamanistic gender identity.

Material and Meaning: Scandinavia in the Fourth to Sixth Centuries AD

Out of the decline and eventual collapse of the Western Roman Empire, a period referred to in Scandinavia as the Migration period emerges, spanning the fifth and the mid- to late sixth centuries CE. As the name might suggest, the destabilization of power relations following this collapse resulted in large-scale migrations across Europe at this time. As trade routes and political ties shifted, a series of new power hierarchies emerged in (what is now known as) Norway, which articulated itself in a number of local, regional, and supra-regional ways.⁸ Notable in Norway is not only a change in the transition into the Migration period proper, but also between the fifth and sixth centuries,⁹ culminating in the break between the Early and Late Iron Age in the mid- to late sixth century. In the case of burial practices, it has been noted by previous scholars that a shift occurs in how the dead are presented, both in terms of treatment of the body and the artefacts they are buried with. Greater emphasis on an individualized human body and more strictly delineated gender produces what has been interpreted as an increasing polarization between male and female within this change.¹⁰ It has, further, been interpreted that within this time span, power is consolidated in Scandinavia and increasingly individualized, where the institutional mobilization of violence known as the *comitatus* structure — the lord and his warrior retinue — emerges.¹¹ This process is notably seen to connect to the enclosed space of the lord's *hall* in the latter part of the Early Iron Age.¹² Here, the power of individual leaders and their warriors

could be asserted within the exclusive environment of the elite. Changes in gender expression are thus put into the context of a change in power dynamics, which may have fed into a shifted perception of the relationship between the body and gender.¹³ Given that the period is defined so strongly by political change, it will come as no surprise that study of this period is characterized by a focus on masculinities and patriarchal power relations. The paradigmatic counterpart to the warrior role in this period is the *lady of the house*: the carrier of the cup at feasts, the carrier of keys, and the (symbolic or actual) textile- and leather-worker. Previously, study of gender in the fourth to sixth centuries has largely focused on the relations between these two categories, epitomizing 'man' and 'woman', their social roles, and the power dynamics between them. However, it should be noted that there are researchers, such as Per Ditlef Fredriksen, who have emphasized that a third grouping 'in between' the masculine and feminine is arguably present, which was suppressed as the male–female dichotomy gained force, a point I will return to.¹⁴

A crucial part of the interpretive basis for these oppositional categories is the mortuary material. Male and female burials have from the infancy of archaeology as a research field been interpreted as being delineated by mutually exclusive artefact categories — weaponry indicating male and textile- and leather-making tools as well as large amounts of personal adornment, including keys, indicating female.¹⁵ There is an undercurrent of the active male and the passive female in this bifurcation, a dichotomy founded in interpretive practices established in the early history of archaeology as a research field. This narrative has been criticized previously as being both reductive and reflecting Victorian gender ideals.¹⁶ To loosen interpretation from these static binaries, I argue it is necessary to study *processes* of gender, how the codification of gender on the multidimensional body is maintained and ruptured through time.

The case study used in this text consists of sixty-six burials from sixty-two contexts from the fourth to sixth centuries in the regions Voss and Hardanger, western Norway.¹⁷ Although the fourth century is the terminus of the Roman Iron Age, preceding the Migration period, I have chosen to include burials from this century in the analysis, as dating is largely conducted through typology in these cases, and the fourth and

7 See, for instance, Hanisch 2001; Myhre 2005; Fredriksen 2006a; 2006b.

8 Enright 1988; Herschend 1993; Näsman 1998; Wiker 2001; Solberg 2003, 76–77, 124–26, 141; Mansrud 2006, 133.

9 Fredriksen 2006a, 271.

10 See Kristoffersen 2000; Fredriksen 2006a.

11 Myhre 2005.

12 Herschend 1993; Hatling 2013.

13 Herschend 1993; Myhre 2005; Fredriksen 2006a, 271–72.

14 Kristoffersen 2000; Aannestad 2004; Myhre 2005; Fredriksen 2006a.

15 e.g., Kristoffersen 2000; Hanisch 2001; Fredriksen 2006a.

16 Arwill-Norbladh 1998.

17 The analysis is based on documented data from excavated burials. See Næss 1996 and Hanisch 2001.

fifth centuries are similar enough in material culture that they are often difficult to differentiate.

The material displays not only a change in how burials containing weaponry or textile- and leather-making tools are presented, but also a related change in a third type of burial — one characterized by the inclusion of bear claws, as well as intermixing of both skeletal material and artefacts associated with the two aforementioned burial groups.¹⁸ Below, I outline the theoretical and methodological basis of this analysis, before discussing the results.

A World of Difference: Theoretical Framings

In recent years, the materiality of the archaeological past has been brought to the fore by many researchers, with arguments revolving around the integration of the agency of the non-human material world, and how humans and non-human entities in reciprocal processes constitute society,¹⁹ a development which I draw on in this chapter. In particular, the theorists dealing with this type of process-based thinking that will be utilized here are Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and their theory of assemblage.

The concept of assemblage, a collection of elements delineated by space and time, is appropriated in a number of ways by Deleuze and Guattari throughout their book *A Thousand Plateaus*,²⁰ to describe and discuss the tangle of elements that make up a given event or process. In Deleuze and Guattari's words, 'an assemblage, in its multiplicity, necessarily acts on semiotic flows, material flows, and social flows simultaneously'.²¹ As outlined by Harris and Robb,²² the body, being a conglomeration of virtual and tangible processes, is actualized differentially in different contexts. Here, I will use assemblages as an entry point for a discussion of the overlapping processes of gender articulation in mortuary proceedings in the past, and how the remains of such are interpreted in the present.

Gender is a process that involves the material body engaging in multiplicit social and semiotic relations, which, with a basis in Deleuze and Guattari's thinking,²³ can be delineated as two different modes of thought. It can be understood as binary and *embodied*, within the bounds

of the (relating) categories man and woman, where the body is displaced from its non-signified existence and reconstructed as a signified subject. These subjectivities are maintained by underlying relations between institutional hierarchy (large-scale expectations of gender presentation) and its maintenance in social and bodily performance.²⁴ A multiple and *enacted* understanding of gender, on the other hand, presents as more diverse, emphasizing shifting personhood, a genderedness that is *becoming*, continuously transformative. Gender is detached, within this system, from an underlying bodily 'nature of being' in ways that negate the individualized subject.²⁵ The embodied and the enacted are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but may, in fact, coexist within a given societal context. Depending on the rigidity of social categorization, enacted gender may exist *between* embodied categories. However, within a context of intensified concepts of embodiment, the enacted may fall between concepts of subject and object, being cast as a volatile 'in-between'-ness. This, potentially, could become threatening to social order, seen as, in the words of Julia Kristeva, 'the place where meaning collapses'.²⁶ With a basis in the foundational work that has already been done on gender and power relations in the Migration period,²⁷ I aim to reframe the way gender is categorized as a set of interrelated and multidimensional processes.

Burial Clustering: Methodological Framings

To tease out differences in the material, I have used the statistical method cluster analysis to analyse patterning of grave-goods from the sixty-six burials outlined above. Material from Voss and Hardanger has been central to discussion of gender in the Migration period in Norway, due in no small part to the comprehensive studies and catalogues of Jenny-Rita Næss, Morten Hanisch, and Siv Kristoffersen, so the area presents itself as an ideal case study.²⁸ Due to the nature of the analysis, only burials with a thorough description of grave-goods, as well as supplementary information on treatment of the deceased and grave architecture were included. Additionally, burials dated broadly to the Early Iron

18 See also Hvoslev Krüger 1988; Hanisch 2001; Fredriksen 2006a; 2010.

19 Examples include Boivin 2004; Ingold 2008; Harris and Robb 2012; Hodder 2012, 1–3; Marshall and Alberti 2014; Hamilakis and Jones 2017; Robb and Harris 2018.

20 Deleuze and Guattari 2013.

21 Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 24.

22 Harris and Robb 2012.

23 Deleuze and Guattari 2013.

24 Foucault 2002, 50; Butler 2007.

25 Pilling 1997; Hollimon 2006.

26 Kristeva 1982, 2.

27 See Kristoffersen 2000; Hanisch 2001; Fredriksen 2010.

28 All information on these burials and their goods is based on documented descriptions. For Voss, this was found in Næss 1996, for Hardanger this was found in Hanisch 2001, both supplemented by the catalogues in Fett 1954a, 1954b, 1954c, 1954d, 1955a, 1956b, 1956c, and Kristoffersen 2000. See Aslesen 2020, table 2 and appendices for the empirical basis of this chapter.

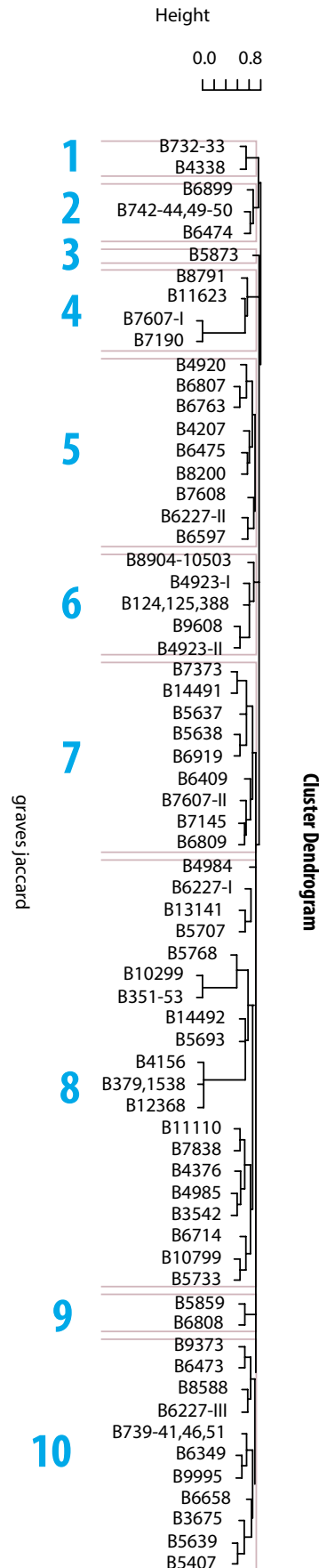


Figure 5.1. Dendrogram of the average linkage cluster analysis of the presence and absence of the thirty-one artefactual categories in all sixty-six burials, using Jaccard's coefficient. The cluster analysis was conducted in R x64. Figure by author.

Age, although conceivably dating to the period studied, were discounted due to uncertainty.

Cluster analysis is a term that describes a number of varieties of the same technique. The type used here is *average linkage cluster analysis*, where the arithmetic average of similarity between pairs of members defines the similarity and dissimilarity between groups. This is the most widely used type of cluster analysis in archaeology and is regarded as producing the most consistently satisfying results, as it defines average difference between all entities, and is therefore best suited to identifying group structures.²⁹ Because there are a large number of variables in the material used here (thirty-one artefact categories), my analysis utilizes average linkage analysis with *Jaccard's coefficient*.

When using Jaccard's coefficient, only presence-absence data has bearing on the analysis, and negative matches between data points are disregarded, so only the *co-occurrence* of artefact types plays into the results.³⁰ This choice is made because I deem gender systems to be reliant on the extent to which certain artefact types tend to occur together within a structure,³¹ the relative amounts of material being secondary. Supporting this idea, attempts to read results of analyses where both positive and negative matches and/or amounts were considered did not show any significant patterning. It should be noted, however, that statistical analyses are not a representation of neutral facts. The choices that are made, with regard to different techniques and ways of structuring the data, derive from the question the analysis is tailored to, and therefore has the potential to produce a variety of different results.³² It can nonetheless be argued that cluster analysis may be used to produce results indicating latent structures within the data, the meaning of which may then be interpreted. The key potential of this method is to uncover unexplored patterns and challenge the qualitative practice of assigning certain artefacts exclusively to particular genders.

The results of the analysis (Fig. 5.1) were a division of burials into ten groups, of which three types were most clearly defined. One type consisting of nine burials (group 7 in the initial analysis) were burials clustered together by the inclusion of textile- and leather-making tools,³³ one type consisting of thirteen burials (groups 9–10) through the inclusion of weaponry and few other artefacts, and one type consisting of nine burials (group 5) through

²⁹ Shennan 1997, 239–40; Baxter 2015, 153.

³⁰ Shennan 1997, 228–31.

³¹ Manly 1996, 473.

³² Shennan 1997, 218–19.

³³ Additionally, burial B6227-I from the adjacent group 8 is interpreted as a burial of this kind, as it shows similar characteristics in its presentation of textile- and leather-making tools, as well as occurring in a triple burial with graves of the other two types.

the inclusion of bear claws. As is readily apparent, this only represents a portion of the material, and artefacts found within these three groups are also found outside them. It is my argument that artefactual categories are only as definitional as their relations to other artefacts, and other aspects of the burial. Below, I will consider the results in more detail, and how they may be interpreted.

Processes of Changing Gender Expression in the Fourth to Sixth Centuries in Voss and Hardanger

The changes in mortuary proceedings that take place in the transition between the fifth and sixth centuries has been expounded on previously, notably in an important contribution to the perception of gender by Per Ditlef Fredriksen,³⁴ in which he states that 'there was a decisive change in metaphorical expression in mortuary practice in western Norway from AD 475–500' and

the first half of the Migration period seems to reflect a relatively higher degree of gender complementarity, including practices of deconstruction/reconstruction of social identity and shamanistic characteristics, compared to burials from the latter half. Graves from the latter half seem to reflect an emerging emphasis on polarisation of gender identities, of idealised hegemonic masculinities and femininities associated with the activities of the emerging *comitatus* structure and aristocratic feasting in the hall.³⁵

While regarding gender as permeable and cumulative, the interpretation put forward by Fredriksen is at its core representationalist, focusing on the change in what he identifies as the key metaphors of 'journey, regeneration and the hall, a shift which was closely related to changing conceptualizations of the human body and societal ideals for agency related to gender identities' in this period.³⁶ I echo Fredriksen's argument that this is a process related to changing power structures, connecting social performance that more tightly regulated identity relations with a new type of embodiment. However, shifting perspective slightly, the aspects related to the change in mortuary material in the fourth to sixth centuries I will touch on are how this amounts to a shift from an *enacted* mode of expression of bodies to a hegemonic, *embodied* binary. This shift

is demonstrated most conspicuously in the three most pronounced types noted in the statistical analysis.

The three types are textile- and leather-making tool burials (group 7), weapons burials (groups 9–10), and bear-claw burials (group 5). The textile- and leather-making burials are characterized by tools of production for textile and leather, as well as containing this material's only two sets of keys. These artefacts have previously been interpreted as the characteristic items of the *lady of the house*, with a set of keys being her highest symbol,³⁷ indicating her status as the keeper of the household, and textile- and leather-making tools indicating her domestic activities. However, as Heidi Berg asserts, what defines the concept 'lady of the house' is often quite nebulous.³⁸ Being subject to both regional and temporal variation, this designation may be too generalizing to be useful. By contrast, the weapon burials are both more constrained temporally, and more uniform in how they operate materially. The weapons burials are typically characterized by sets of weaponry, with a 'full' set designated as a sword, two spears, arrows, and shields, and few other artefacts within the grave. In earlier studies it has been argued that this indicates the presence of a military hierarchy of the war-lord and his retinue of warriors, coming to epitomize the conductor of political affairs and the inciter of violence.³⁹ While spears are exclusively found in these burials, arrows are also found in both group 5 and 7, as well as 6 and 8 in the analysis, meaning they are fairly ubiquitous. Swords, furthermore, are also found in groups 3 and 8, appearing to engage in a broader range of material relations.⁴⁰ It should be noted, however, that the vast majority of the swords in this case study, five out of seven, are found in groups 9–10. Both groups 7 and 9–10 are weighted towards the sixth century. In the case of the final group, bear-claw burials, it is the obverse, with only two burials securely dated to the final part of the Migration period.

Another contrast between groups 7 and 9–10 and group 5 is that all burials in the two former groups are inhumations, and all burials in group 5 are cremations, although the statistical analysis itself does not take funerary treatment into account. This indicates a strong correlation between the two former burial types and *embodied* subjectivity, and situational, multiple, and enacted expressions in the latter. The *enacted* body negates permanence and stability of identity, constantly oscillating between states: human and human, human and animal,

37 Enright 1988; Kristoffersen 2000, 130–43; Hanisch 2001, 70–71, 76; Aannestad 2004.

38 Berg 2013, 98.

39 Næss 1996, 77–78; Hedeager 1992; Herschend 1993; Näsman 1998; Wiker 2001.

40 Interpreting or discussing the precise character of these relations falls outside the scope of this text.

34 Fredriksen 2006a, 271.

35 Fredriksen 2006a, 281.

36 Fredriksen 2006a, 281.

multiple material spheres, *becoming*, and continuously receiving new relations in the multidimensionality of bodies.⁴¹ In a synthesis of burials with bear claws, Hvoslev Krüger theorizes that burials containing bear claws from western Norway at large — sixty-five in total — may have been participants in a particular ritual practice (specifically a cult worshipping the god Odin).⁴² However, she does not consider treatment of the body to be a relevant factor, expressly equating cremation and inhumation burial, despite only three out of the sixty-five burials being inhumations, and the rest cremations. By my classification, bear-claw burials are characterized, as indicated above, by the inclusion of bear claws as well as material that is intermingled: both materials associated with the above two types, as well as, in some cases, possibly skeletal material. Although there is significant uncertainty in interpretation of the available osteological analysis, partial and done decades ago, the finding is viewed as sufficiently credible that some burials contained multiple species of animal remains, and may have contained the remains of more than one human skeleton.

Bear-claw burials have been remarked upon previously.⁴³ However, the interpretation of this type of burial as an expression of a gender identity category has largely been discussed in terms of orders of difference from and convergence with the established bifurcation of gender expression. Rather than continuously redefining relationships between oppositional entities,⁴⁴ we may through *difference* describe the relations that burials enact with other burials. Defining certain burials by conformity or lack thereof to others only give them recognition by degrees of deviance from the perceived norm.⁴⁵ This is why, while previous study of multiplicit gender expression through queer theory has been a useful device for looking at archaeological contexts differently,⁴⁶ ‘queering’ may be detrimental to interpretation, because one has already decided what is the normative, and through that we may fail to see broader patterns of multidimensional bodily materiality, as well as reinforcing the assumption that binary gender is universal. As opposed to defining itself by a transgression of established patterns, bear-claw burials can be seen as a *smoothing* of material relationships.⁴⁷ Through this, these burials *enact* certain associations and roles continuously producing gender.

The presence of bear claws in these burials has previously been interpreted as relating to shamanistic practices.⁴⁸ Bears have a particular significance in both historic and contemporary circumpolar shamanistic tradition,⁴⁹ with which ritual practices in the Scandinavian Iron Age share many characteristics.⁵⁰ Further, perhaps the most significant artefact category delineated within this group are bone hair pins, only found in group 5. These are pins found across Norway in the Migration period, and through well-preserved burials in northern Norway it is demonstrated that these pins were used in a particular hair coiffure, where the hair was done up in a style with a coif on either side of the head. Interestingly, the same coiffure is found on gold bracteates of the C type, amulets widely interpreted as depicting shamanic practitioners, and possibly specifically Odin.⁵¹ However, this hairstyle is not found on any contemporary masculine imagery, but it is found on Late Iron Age imagery depicting women, such as on the pair motifs of the following Merovingian period’s gold foils, Gotlandic picture stones, and Viking Age ‘Valkyrie’ figures.⁵² Somehow, the identity presentation of this hairstyle passes into particular presentations of womanhood in subsequent periods. To discuss possibilities around what may have caused this, I turn to the one multiple burial in this case study that contains all three groups.

In the burial colloquially named *Byrkjehaugen* (‘the Byrkje mound’), a triple burial, examples of all three aforementioned groups are found. The dead were placed on top of one another in a cist, separated by layers of birch bark. On the bottom was a textile- and leather-making burial,⁵³ on top of which was a bear-claw burial, and finally, on the top, a weapons burial. They all appear to have been buried within a relatively short span of time, all three containing bucket-shaped pots of the same type, vessels characteristic of the last phase of the Migration period. The textile- and leather-making burial and the weapons burial were placed with heads in opposite directions to each other, enclosing the cremation burial between them. This cremation is one of only two bear-claw burials from the sixth century, so it is conspicuous that it is found in between the two others, this multiplicity contrasting

41 See Mansrud 2006; 2008 for similar arguments rooted in the deconstruction and reconstruction of identity in cremation burial.

42 Hvoslev Krüger 1988.

43 Fredriksen 2006a; see also Mansrud 2006; Kirkinen 2017 for further discussion on shaman burials.

44 Marshall and Alberti 2014, 22.

45 Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 208.

46 For example, Solli 1999; 2008; Wiker 2001; Fredriksen 2010.

47 Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 433.

48 Fredriksen 2006a, 278–79.

49 Kailo 1997; Sutherland 2001; Janhunen 2003.

50 See Price 2004.

51 Wiker 2001; Hedeager 2011, 75.

52 See, for instance, Back Danielsson 2007; Hedeager 2011; Gardela and others 2022.

53 This burial, in the analysis, falls outside of group 7, instead being grouped in the adjacent group 8. However, due to its inclusion of both a (possibly two) weaving batten(s), a skin-scraper used for leatherwork, as well as being an inhumation burial from the sixth century found in juxtaposition with the two other types, I have chosen to interpret it as a textile- and leather-making burial.

with the seemingly binary, unitary bodies enveloping it. It appears as if the bear-claw burial falls between and, soon after, it will cease to be found in mortuary contexts at all, its tapering presence negotiated by its enclosure by the other two.

The significant social changes occurring in the sixth century have been argued by Gry Wiker,⁵⁴ and subsequently Fredriksen,⁵⁵ to be linked to new concepts of decency brought on by the influence of Christianity in Europe, while Hanisch sees it as related to new concepts of honour.⁵⁶ However, it may be more closely related to the increased focus on militarization. As Michel Foucault points out, social performance in enclosed spaces encourages both monitoring of the behaviour of oneself and that of others.⁵⁷ As has been argued previously,⁵⁸ the *comitatus* structure would have enabled the strict delineation between masculine and feminine performance as well as the enactment of violence being cast as an extension of power.⁵⁹ By the same token, however, some of the characteristics that delineate the textile- and leather-making burials also have proximity to military motifs, such as weaving battens bearing certain similarities to swords and, in fact, being in some cases shown to be made out of swords that have been repurposed.⁶⁰ Although much later, in Icelandic literature, weaving is a powerful creative practice, often linked to determination of fate.⁶¹ Rather than being an 'honorary male phenomenon', as Hanisch argues,⁶² there might be an indication that the weaving batten(s) found in B6227-I may be, similarly to B6227-III's weaponry, connected to decisions in the political arena and the mobilization of violence, and an indication of rigidifying identity structures in the midst of a tumultuous period of social upheaval.⁶³ Where power is derived from control over

individualized subjects by appropriation of violence, the multiplicity may become unruly, its *becoming* and multidimensionality a threatening 'in-between'-ness, and so it may be gradually suppressed.⁶⁴

Concluding Remarks: A New Path to the Gendered

In the poem 'Not Even', Ocean Vuong writes the line 'Body, doorway that you are, be more than what I'll pass through'.⁶⁵ The body, in life and in death, is animated by thrusts of relative power passing through each other. I have used the case study of fourth- to sixth-century CE burials in western Norway to demonstrate how statistical differentiation may shed light on how culturally and socially specific processes express themselves materially, intersecting to continuously produce and reproduce, maintain and rupture concepts of gender. Rather than adhering to the qualitative determination of gender based on supreme artefact categories, a quantitative approach recontextualizes identity-signalling as an intersectional practice that may involve diverse gender expressions. Ultimately, the key outcome of this analysis is a demonstration of how qualitative statistical analysis is able to better show the nuance and relationality in burial groupings.

It is, perhaps, uncontroversial to say that artefacts in burials should not be reduced to symbols, which effectively displace them from how they co-acted with those that used them in life. They possess certain properties and capacities to act that define the limits and extent of interpretation.⁶⁶ As the cluster analysis demonstrates, a sword pommel found in an upturned urn (B5873) containing cremated remains enacts very different material relations from an inhumation containing a full weapons set, and the benefit of statistical differentiation is that it allows us to delve further into these dissimilarities. In order to see how the material co-acts,⁶⁷ much nuance is gained from seeing through *difference*, potentially arriving at more robust ideas around what gender is, and what it might be: a conglomeration of material culture, semiotics, and how it is used in discourse, in overlapping multiplicities. In trying to rather open analysis up to the notion of 'becoming' gendered as a constantly produced and reproduced practice, we might explore new possibilities for gender categorization in the past.⁶⁸

54 Wiker 2001.

55 Fredriksen 2006a.

56 Hanisch 2001.

57 Foucault 1991.

58 Hanisch 2001; Fredriksen 2006a.

59 See Arendt 1970; Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 409–92. See Hanisch 2001 for a similar argument which mine builds on, although it differs in its conclusions about gender relations.

60 One weaving batten from a burial in Nornes, Sogn og Fjordane, shows damascing, and one from a burial from Holum, Leikanger, Sogn og Fjordane had a blood groove; Hanisch 2001, 80; Kristoffersen 2000, 355–59.

61 The three Nornir in Norse mythology who weave human destinies, and the reference to a 'battle-loom' in *Njáls saga* are examples of this, see Enright 1988, 66; Hanisch 2001, 79. There are also slightly more ambiguous references linking weaving and influencing the outcome of future acts of violence in *Orkneyinga saga* and *Laxdaela saga*, see Smith 2020. Furthermore, in *Beowulf* line 697, Queen Wealhtheow is referred to as a 'peace-weaver', see Enright 1988, 189; Hanisch 2001, 79 with references, Neidorf 2016.

62 Hanisch 2001, 80–81.

63 Fredriksen 2010, 22.

64 Kristeva 1982; Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 204–08, 417–18.

65 Vuong 2022, 35.

66 See Bennett 2010, 28–31 and Crellin and Harris 2021.

67 Deleuze and Guattari 2013, 24.

68 Butler 2007; Robb and Harris 2018; Moen 2019a; 2019b. See also Deleuze and Guattari 1994 for a similar argument regarding philosophy.

Acknowledgements

Time and support for writing this chapter was provided by the 'BODY-POLITICS' research project, funded by the European Research Council (ERC) under the

European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement no. 949886). I would also like to thank my MPhil supervisor, Dr Vibeke Viestad, for all her support in writing my thesis, on which this text is based.

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6. Golden Revelations

Revisiting the Richly Furnished Graves of the Migration Period in Southern Norway

Gold is a remarkable metal. Despite its vanishing rarity in the Earth's crust, gold has been deeply intertwined with human history for millennia. Because of its inherent resistance to corrosion over time, archaeological encounters with the shiny material give almost unchanged glimpses into material realities of different pasts. In my recent study of Migration-period (c. AD 400 to 550) gold from Norway,¹ it became very clear to me how gold has shaped understandings of this period in time and space. In modern narratives about the Migration period, emphasis is often placed on chiefdoms, warriors, alliance building, and/or petty kings.² Throughout this, gold lies as a symbol of power and wealth, most often associated with social status, themes and categories that are traditionally linked to men and the masculine (although there are exceptions).³ However, when I explored gold found in graves, using traditional gendered categories, a very different pattern emerged: it is mainly women who were buried with gold. In fact, very few male graves had gold in them. There appears, to my surprise, to be a discrepancy between the archaeological material and the narratives based on it.

In Norway, Migration-period gold most often appears in two very specific archaeological contexts: in hoards and in graves.⁴ Here, my focus is on graves. In the literature graves containing gold are interpreted as representing the upper echelons of society. By using graves with gold from the Migration period in Rogaland, Vestfold, and Østfold as a case study, I want to examine what happens to the traditional narratives

if the archaeological material is taken literally. To this end, I will first devote a section to examining some prevalent patterns in previous research, followed by an exploration of the material and accompanying reflections.

Stories Told: Deconstructing Grave Gold

The Migration period has long been referred to as 'the golden age of Scandinavia'.⁵ Modern perceptions of the period are often connected with gold, as it is a prominent material feature, shaping both the broad lines and smaller perspectives alike.⁶ To study Migration-period gold is to study not only the material culture, but also the modern perspectives and perceptions through which the gold and time period are interpreted. In previous research, gold has been portrayed in various ways, such as through specific object types,⁷ its placement in the landscape,⁸ its role within ritual, economic, and power political strategies,⁹ and its connection to cultural knowledge as interpreted through iconography.¹⁰ 'Burial gold' as an element in the development of various societal models and narratives is an important background for my discussion, due to the significant influence that research on gold from graves has had. The recognition that knowledge is shaped by the cultural context in

¹ The unpublished PhD thesis Amundsen 2021.

² e.g., Myhre 1987; 1991; Ringstad 1992; Skre 1998.

³ e.g., Kristoffersen 2000b; Røstad 2021.

⁴ Clearly shown by Boe 1921 and 1926.

⁵ e.g., Gjessing 1944, 132; Hedeager 2011, 144, 164.

⁶ Amundsen 2021, 72–73.

⁷ e.g., Wiker 2000; Axboe 2007; Reiersen 2018.

⁸ e.g., Hedeager 2003.

⁹ e.g., Brøgger 1921; Munch 1956; Myhre 1987; 1991; Hedeager 1992; Ringstad 1992; Skre 1998; Kristoffersen 2000b.

¹⁰ Hedeager 1999; Kristoffersen 1995; 2000a; 2000b; 2002; 2010.

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which it is produced and understood,¹¹ is here crucial in understanding how such perspectives continue to inform and shape interpretations of the period.

From Wealth, Migration, and Inner Expansion to Elites, Centres, and Territories

Within Norwegian archaeology, there are two seminal works that serve as overviews of gold objects from the Migration period. Authored by Johs. Bøe, these works, published approximately a century ago, are still being used today. The first, *Norske guldfund fra folkevandringstiden* (Eng.: Norwegian Gold Finds from the Migration period, my translation), was published in 1921,¹² followed by *Norsk gravguld fra ældre jernalder* (Eng.: Norwegian Grave Gold from the Early Iron Age, my translation) in 1926.¹³ Bøe examined gold from burial contexts in the Early Iron Age, discussing graves, various object types, and the societal significance of gold. Bøe makes the interesting observation that gold objects are rarely intentionally destroyed, even in cremation graves where other jewellery typically suffers this fate, suggesting that gold's distinct role transcended personal adornment and highlighting its exceptional qualities.¹⁴ In doing so, he portrays gold as an exceptional and uncommon element, which in my opinion reflects a lingering perception of gold as something distinct and extraordinary, seemingly persisting both in the past and present. Bøe's descriptions of graves containing gold often include gendered classifications based on the presence of specific artefacts. He designates graves with certain types of jewellery as *Kvindefund* or *kvindegrav* (women's graves), while those containing weapons are labelled *Mandsfund* or *mandsgrav* (men's graves).¹⁵ While acknowledging that gold is found in both, he notes that it is 'noget almindeligere' (somewhat more common)¹⁶ in women's graves, attributing this to the higher prevalence of jewellery found within them.

Haakon Shetelig and Anton W. Brøgger,¹⁷ both renowned Norwegian archaeologists, also briefly discussed gold in graves as an indicator of wealth and contact networks a century ago. Interestingly, these understandings of the material seem to have been considered so self-evident that it required no further discourse, and this sense of taken-for-grantedness

continues to prevail to a considerable extent even in the present day.¹⁸ With the functionalism of the 1920s and 1930s, and strongly influenced by anthropology, the question of how Iron Age societies were structured became prominent.¹⁹ Explanatory models for the changes in the archaeological material from the Late Roman and Migration periods underwent a shift from explaining the changes as immigration to internal expansion,²⁰ gold being a part of the material basis of the discussions.²¹

After processual archaeology first gained a foothold in Nordic archaeology from the late 1970s, gold was to a larger degree associated with the chieftain model, focusing on the interactions between elites, centres, and regions. Bjørn Myhre and Bjørn Ringstad made significant contributions to the study of political structure in the Norwegian Iron Age.²² Myhre's research also reached a larger international audience. His 1987 article on 'Chieftains' Graves and Chieftain Territories in South Norway in the Migration Period' became a seminal work, highlighting economic surplus and political centres indicated by 'rich finds'.²³ He posited that south and west Norway were divided into several economic and political centres and units in the Late Roman and Migration periods. The units were interpreted as organized regionally into chiefdoms ruled by chieftains who oversaw redistributive economies. He points out that his maps show 'a static, idealized picture'²⁴ that probably changed over time, and in a subsequent article he modified the model somewhat and represented the economic and political situation as more complex.²⁵ In their studies, both Myhre and Ringstad considered graves as rich if they contained at least two of three categories of prestige objects: imported glass, bronze cauldrons, and gold objects.²⁶ This also led to a significant overlap in their respective central areas and centres of power.²⁷ As such, both researchers saw gold as a clear indicator of social status, similar to Bøe, Shetelig, and Brøgger.

Even though Myhre's model continues to form a basis for how societal structures in this period are understood, it has not been left unchallenged. For example, Frans-Arne Stylegar's research in the Lista and

11 Haraway 1988.

12 Bøe 1921.

13 Bøe 1926, 80–81.

14 Bøe 1926, 80.

15 Bøe 1926.

16 Bøe 1926, 80, author's translation.

17 Shetelig 1912, 160–69; Brøgger 1925, 188–89, 213–14.

18 See Amundsen 2021, 50–51.

19 Kristoffersen 2000b, 30–45, see also Trigger 2006, 314–85.

20 Hagen 2002, see also Reiersen 2017, 18–23 for detailed review and discussion.

21 e.g., in Shetelig 1925; Herteig 1955; Slomann 1956; 1968; 1972.

22 e.g., Myhre 1978; 1982; 1987; 1991; Ringstad 1992.

23 Myhre 1987.

24 Myhre 1987, 184.

25 Myhre 1991.

26 Myhre 1987; 1991; Ringstad 1992.

27 Reiersen 2017, 65.

Spangereid areas suggested a polycentric model rather than a single centre tied to a large territory.²⁸ In a more recent study, Håkon Reiersen focused on centres and local elite environments in Rogaland and Hordaland in the Late Roman and Migration periods, examining the relationship between elites and centres in a broader Scandinavian context.²⁹ Reiersen identifies gold and visually shiny objects as markers of elite status,³⁰ also noting material variations between centres.³¹ While multiple elite environments can be connected to the same centre, Reiersen's study confirms the continued relevance of Myhre and Ringstad's models of centres in the Early Iron Age, with modifications, while also emphasizing elite environments and showing the significance of gold in these milieus.

Geir Grønnesby has highlighted the extensive referencing of Myhre's work by numerous researchers investigating the structure of Early Iron Age societies,³² such as Lotte Hedeager,³³ Dagfinn Skre,³⁴ and Trond Løken's many publications on the Forsand excavations.³⁵ A common thread among these studies is the interpretation of Early Iron Age societies as inherently hierarchical.³⁶ Grønnesby points out that the establishment of the chieftdom model — where gold has played an important part — can be understood as a 'black box'.³⁷ The concept stems from Bruno Latour and is used to describe facts or truths that seem to be so blatantly apparent that they escape scrutiny or questioning.³⁸

It is noteworthy that in several of the aforementioned studies, there is a noticeable link between gold and what I understand to be men in leadership roles. In light of Grønnesby's use of the black box metaphor, I would argue that gold as signalling (often) male power is another black box that is in need of opening. While not always explicitly stated, the terminology used evokes notions of leadership positions predominantly occupied by men, such as 'petty kings', 'dominions' (Norw.: *herredømme*), or 'warlords', often in conjunction with the concept of 'chieftain' and elaborate male graves.³⁹ The discourse has been heavily biased towards men in positions of power and their roles in society.⁴⁰ Such perspectives

often over-emphasize the warrior archetype, to the point of overshadowing other aspects of society. Additionally, it also presupposes that power was held almost solely by men, neglecting other social and material realities of the time. A more comprehensive understanding of the Migration period must consider a broader range of perspectives, as highlighted by similar arguments in Bronze Age and Viking-period research,⁴¹ and of what power is and how it works.⁴²

However, there are also some clear exceptions from the black box of gold and men. The richly furnished women's graves, and with them also the role of women in the Iron Age, were discussed in the 1980s and 1990s through a series of articles, many of them in the journal *Women in Archaeology in Norway (K.A.N.)*.⁴³ Yet, these contributions to the discourse seem largely overlooked in later times.⁴⁴ More directly in this context, Siv Kristoffersen and Ingunn M. Røstad have highlighted the contributions of women in the Migration period in their research.⁴⁵ While their studies are not mainly focused on graves with gold, both have such graves as part of their empirical foundations. Kristoffersen was the first to actively include and ascribe elite women agency within a social model as 'lady of the house'.⁴⁶ She analysed the presence of gilded objects with animal style ornamentation in graves, exploring the relationship between ornamentation and societal organization, also drawing on the societal model proposed by Myhre, with modifications.⁴⁷ In doing so, she acknowledged women as intertwined with gold, encompassing the realms of politics, economy, rituals, and everyday life. Røstad's recent study focused on dress-accessories, and further expands upon the understanding of women's roles during the Migration period.⁴⁸ She offers nuanced perspectives on the multifaceted lives of women, refining our knowledge of their contributions.

On the Use of Binary Gender

The discerning reader may by now question the employment of binary gender in this analysis, given that my discussion relies heavily on 'gendered' graves. The discussion about gender in the past is large and

28 Stylegar 2001, see also Stylegar and Grimm 2004.

29 Reiersen 2017.

30 Reiersen 2017, 46.

31 Reiersen 2017, 297.

32 Grønnesby 2019, 52.

33 Hedeager 1992.

34 Skre 1998.

35 e.g., Løken 1991.

36 Grønnesby 2019, 53.

37 Grønnesby 2019, 53.

38 Latour 1987, 3, 131; Grønnesby 2019, 23.

39 e.g., Myhre 1987; 1991; Ringstad 1992; Skre 1998.

40 As emphasized by Røstad 2021, 310–15.

41 e.g., Pedersen 2008; Brück 2017, 37; Moen 2019b.

42 Following Lund and others 2022.

43 e.g., Lillehammer 1988; 1996; Kristoffersen 1992; Engevik jr. 1995; Stylegar 1995.

44 See Skogstrand 2023 for a discussion of *K.A.N.* as a 'safe-space'.

45 Kristoffersen 2000b; Røstad 2021; see also the works of Bente Magnus, e.g., Magnus 2014.

46 Kristoffersen 2000b.

47 Myhre 1987; 1991, as outlined in Kristoffersen 2000b, 38–39.

48 Røstad 2021.

complex,⁴⁹ and within archaeology it is most often related to what we understand as *gender expressions* in graves. These discussions also reflect the existing debate about social gender and biological sex, both in terms of what one puts into the categories themselves and in terms of what one can actually see in archaeological contexts.⁵⁰ For example, in the distinction between sex and gender there lies a problematic idea that sex also creates gender, and that our modern binary gender role pattern is universal.⁵¹ The division into two genders is, as shown by Laqueur,⁵² both culturally structured and time-specific.⁵³ One should not automatically assume that modern notions can be transferred to the societies of the past. Gender is *one among many* aspects of personal identity that may also have been clarified in death.⁵⁴ As such, determining the gender of graves is a difficult subject. Both as ‘interpreting’ gendered bodies, and understanding the ways in which this has been meaningful within specific social realities.

Analyses of burials in archaeology have traditionally assumed that gender was the primary social variable.⁵⁵ The majority of previous research on Migration-period graves in Norway has largely employed such traditional gendered categories. To investigate binary gendered patterns of gold in the graves was not my initial intention, yet in my meetings with both the material and the stories told, certain patterns emerged that could not be ignored. Specifically, it begged the question of whether or not the narrative of male dominance in societies during the Migration period would indeed hold true, when actively utilizing the more traditional gender categorizations on graves with gold. Working from the hypothesis that gold does signal wealth and power, as is also present in many narratives, is it really as disproportionately found in men’s graves as opposed to women’s, as one then would expect? The material swiftly began to reveal the complete opposite, echoing the findings from Bøe’s study conducted a century ago,⁵⁶ but hidden in many later studies.

Grave Reflections and ‘Gendered’ Objects

Graves as a source of social order are complex and difficult, yet they are often one of the best archaeological sources we have. Today, the processes of archaeological

data collection and documentation are thorough, as are the requirements for scientific viability. But, as Charlotte Hedenstierna-Jonson remarks, other approaches seem to apply when the process of interpretation begins.⁵⁷ The now famous case of the Birka warrior grave, grave Bj 581, is an example *par excellence* of how the biological sex of an individual can completely upend interpretative schemes.⁵⁸

Graves are composed of a number of aspects (e.g., body, grave-goods, placement in the grave, monument, etc.) and the material aspects may in various ways have been linked to relationships between the living and the dead or ideas about death and the afterlife.⁵⁹ The variations in graves can express social differences in society, but they can also be an expression of local traditions.⁶⁰ Additionally, it is important to consider that gendered ideologies expressed through burial material may not necessarily reflect actual social practices.⁶¹ As such, graves are material expressions of rituals created to fill a myriad of possible roles and functions. Because of this, one cannot expect them to be a direct reflection of society, nor of sex or gender. A starting point for understanding graves is that burial practices are not divided into categories as either ‘social’ or ‘symbolic’, but rather can be understood as *simultaneously* religious, social, economic, and political,⁶² and bound in specific societal contexts and ontologies. Therefore, they can also be assumed to contain information about social norms and ideologies.⁶³ In the same way, we cannot directly know whether the grave-goods were the assets of the deceased also in life, but we can assume that the relationship between the deceased and the objects buried with them is not completely arbitrary.⁶⁴

In Norwegian archaeology, graves have mainly been gendered through grave-goods, as there are rarely skeletal remains due to the preservation conditions. The risks of ‘gendering’ individuals in graves on artefacts based in the two-gender model is well known.⁶⁵ Still, in this chapter I will emphasize the *expression of gender* in graves through grave-goods.⁶⁶ This means that I am consciously relating to standardized and narrow binary

49 See Danielsson 2007; Moen 2019a.

50 e.g., Laqueur 1990; Wylie 1991; Butler 2007 [1999]; Danielsson 2007; Soafer and Sørensen 2013; Moen 2019a.

51 Moen 2019a, 12.

52 Laqueur 1990.

53 See Moen 2019a, 12.

54 Moen 2019a, 116.

55 Arnold 2016, 836.

56 Bøe 1926.

57 Hedenstierna-Jonson (in prep.).

58 Hedenstierna-Jonson and others 2017; Price and others 2019.

59 See e.g., Brück 2017, 39.

60 e.g., Dommasnes 2001; Kristoffersen and Østigård 2006; Østigård 2006; Lund 2013; Barndon and Olsen 2018, 65; Røstad 2021.

61 Brumfiel 2006, 38.

62 Williams 2006, 9.

63 Moen 2019a, 58–59.

64 Lund and Moen 2019, 142–43.

65 See discussion in Danielsson 2007, 49–90, see also for example Soafer and Sørensen 2013, 531, with references, for more on problems with osteological sex determination.

66 Moen 2019a, 122; 2021.

expressions of gender identity, and that graves without such material will be seen as ‘ungendered’.⁶⁷ In this way, graves are ‘gendered’ based on artefacts, and these artefacts are also a part of creating and maintaining modern interpretations of gender in the past. This, Marianne Moen points out, is a circular argument that is difficult to get away from.⁶⁸ And, as pointed out by Ing-Marie Back Danielsson, there is also a lack of discussion on why the objects we ‘gender’ from were placed in the graves in the first place.⁶⁹

Notwithstanding concerns about the accuracy of assuming binary gender norms for a distant past, the classification of men’s and women’s graves is retained here precisely in order to address a research history wherein power, social status, and importance has been ascribed on the basis of assumed gender. As such, gender estimation has mainly been done from the grave-goods in the graves, and in most cases, there is no preserved bone material. Also, graves in general often, but not always, show a correlation between gendered skeletal remains and corresponding archaeological objects that indicate gender.⁷⁰

Gender Indicators in the Analysis of Graves with Gold

Broadly speaking, the literature emphasizes jewellery as a significant marker for women and weapons as a prominent indicator for men during the Iron Age. However, there are notable exceptions to this general pattern, including penannular/annular brooches, arrowheads, and the frequency of cruciform brooches found in a grave. In a study of graves from Hardanger, Morten Hanisch pointed out specific object categories as indicators for women and men in the Roman and Migration periods respectively.⁷¹ I have mainly followed Hanisch’s divisions. Indicators for women are more than two fibulae, relief brooches, gold berlocks, dress- and hairpins, scrapers, spindle whorls, and weaving swords. Beads have also traditionally been ascribed to women’s graves when they are found in greater numbers, where graves with more than three beads are interpreted as belonging to women.⁷² Beads in smaller numbers, usually no more than one, are relatively common in

what are understood to be men’s graves.⁷³ The beads in women’s graves often seem to have been threaded together, some attached to the dress with the help of other jewellery.⁷⁴ Hanisch and Kristoffersen have interpreted keys as belonging to the female sphere,⁷⁵ but it has been shown by Heidi Lund Berg that keys do not occur exclusively in women’s graves and therefore cannot be seen as a ‘gender indicator’.⁷⁶ Indicators for men’s graves are weapons — swords, lances, spears, and shields — as well as axes and belt stones.⁷⁷

Gold in Graves: Insights

A total of 150 graves from the three present-day counties of Rogaland, Vestfold, and Østfold contain gold in the form of objects of massive gold,⁷⁸ or objects *with* gold, first and foremost with a gilt surface.⁷⁹ Initially my aim was to include material only from the Migration period. However, issues with dating, in particular contexts dating to the transition between the Roman period and the Migration period, and the presence of artefacts that cannot be precisely dated, such as finger rings and spiral rings, led to the inclusion of gold artefacts also from the Roman period. Additionally, it is well established that gold became scarce in the transition from the Migration period to the Merovingian period,⁸⁰ therefore the study also included Merovingian-period gold to confirm or refute this trend within the study areas and its implications for our understanding of the use of gold during this time period.⁸¹

There is no comprehensive overview of graves from the periods and areas discussed here, and thus no estimate of the total number of graves. But as a point of reference Frans-Arne Stylegar estimates that there are a total of about 550 weapon graves from the Roman and the Migration periods in Norway.⁸² These weapon graves are referenced as a minority of the total

67 See Moen (this volume) and Croix (this volume) for a discussion on ‘ungendered’ graves.

68 Moen 2019a, 117.

69 Danielsson 2007, 63.

70 Hjørungdal 1994, see also; Kristoffersen 2000b, 102, with references; Røstad 2021 with references.

71 Hanisch 2002, 28, with reference, see also Fredriksen 2006, 274–75.

72 Johansen 2004, 469.

73 Johansen 2004, 469.

74 Kristoffersen 2006, 31.

75 Hanisch 2002; Kristoffersen 2000b.

76 Berg 2015.

77 Hanisch 2002, 28, see also Fredriksen 2006, 274–75; Shetelig 1912, 109–10.

78 It is important to note that the term ‘massive gold’ in this context likely refers to objects made from gold alloys rather than pure gold. Due to the properties of pure gold, which make it challenging to work with and less durable for everyday use, the addition of silver or copper, for instance, could enhance the metal’s hardness and create a wider range of colour.

79 Amundsen 2021.

80 As noted by e.g., Axboe 1999; Hedeager 1992, 25; 2011, 164.

81 See Amundsen 2021, 84–88.

82 Stylegar 2011, 222.



Figure 6.1. An example of a richly furnished woman's grave with gold from Ommundrød, Vestfold, Norway. The grave likely held two individuals distinguishable by the placement of objects within the grave. One of these individuals, identified as a woman due to associated artefacts, possessed an impressive collection of gold and gilded objects, making this one of the graves richest in gold and gilded artefacts in the study areas. The items include two gilded relief brooches, numerous gilded clasps, two gold spiral (finger?) rings, and a gold fragment. Both relief brooches and one spiral ring were found near the woman's feet, which is an uncommon placement for such brooches. They might have been stored in a wooden container. The other spiral ring appears to have been worn as a finger ring, while the clasps were likely part of her attire. In addition to the gold and gilded items, the grave contained a weaving sword/baton, two spindle whorls, tablet-woven textile fragments, two cruciform brooches, several pots (including two bucket-shaped pots), and a glass bowl, among other objects. The other individual's possessions comprised a glass beaker, two of the pots, scissors, a spearhead, tweezers, and one clasp. Photo: Eirik Irgens Johnsen © Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo, CC BY-SA 4.0.

amount of graves.⁸³ Furthermore, in comparison to the larger cemeteries, the modest count of 150 graves containing gold suggests its relative rarity. Notably, well-preserved graves with extensive documentation indicate that gold was characteristic of individuals who possessed substantial resources as many of the graves with gold are also otherwise richly furnished (Fig. 6.1).⁸⁴

Altogether, the 150 graves contained a total of 271 objects of or with gold:⁸⁵ ninety-four graves containing 160 objects in Rogaland, thirty-five graves with seventy-one objects in Vestfold, and twenty-one graves with forty objects in Østfold.

Distribution over Time: Temporal and Geographical Turns

When it comes to dating, discernible patterns begin to surface within the material. There is a clear increase in gold from the Roman period to the Migration period, whilst in the Merovingian period there is very little gold to be found (Table 6.1). With this, the sharp decline in gold from the Early to the Late Iron Age,⁸⁶ which many have pointed out, is clearly present in these graves. There are also differences between east and west (Table 6.1). In the Roman period, the majority of graves are in the east (Vestfold and Østfold). The picture changes in the Migration period, suggesting a shift in the distribution of graves containing gold artefacts from the east to the west (Rogaland) between the Roman period and the Migration period.

The distribution of the most common object types, such as finger rings, roughly follows the distribution of graves. However, certain categories stand out (Table 6.2), such as spiral rings that clearly group in the west. The gold berlocks of the Roman period⁸⁷ are most prevalent to the east, while most of the animal style brooches, a Migration-period phenomenon, come from the west. Specifically, out of a total of twelve brooches with a confirmed dating to the Roman period, ten were discovered in east, with the remaining two being found in Rogaland. Conversely, of the forty-two brooches from the Migration period, twenty-seven were discovered in Rogaland, while fifteen were found in the east, with

Table 6.1. Dating of graves within periods. 'Not dated' — cannot be clearly dated to a period but is most likely from the Early Iron Age. Abbreviations: RP — Roman period, MP — Migration period, MVP — Merovingian period. After Amundsen 2021, table 5.14.

	Rogaland	Vestfold	Østfold	Total
RP	18 (19%)	16 (46%)	14 (67%)	48 (32%)
MP	52 (55%)	12 (34%)	5 (24%)	69 (46%)
RP/MP	2 (2%)	-	-	2 (1%)
MVP	3 (3%)	-	-	3 (2%)
Not dated	19 (20%)	7 (20%)	2 (9%)	28 (19%)
Total	94 (100%)	35 (100%)	21 (100%)	150 (100%)

twelve in Vestfold and three in Østfold.⁸⁸ The prevalence of gilded brooches in the west during the Migration period is in line with Kristoffersen's research, which has established that gilded artefacts were more prevalent on the south-west coast during this period.⁸⁹ The last brooch is from the Merovingian period, further highlighting the decline in gold in the Late Iron Age.

Table 6.2. The numbers of the most common types of objects found in graves within the research areas, sorted by their distribution across the different counties. After Amundsen 2021, table 5.15.

Object type	Rogaland	Vestfold	Østfold	Total
Finger ring	40	20	12	72
Brooch	30	16	9	55
Utility gold ⁹⁰	19	5	-	24
Clasps	12	6	1	19
Gold bracteate	14	3	-	17
Gold berlock	2	6	8	16
Bead	-	6	5	11
Mounting	10	-	1	11

Gendered Patterns

A detailed examination of the 150 graves revealed that 53 per cent have been identified as belonging to women, 15 per cent as belonging to men, 3 per cent as possible double graves containing both a woman and a man, and 29 per cent do not possess any male/female gendered determining objects (Table 6.3). This pattern of undetermined gender within graves is consistent with

⁸³ Stylegar 2011, 217.

⁸⁴ Amundsen 2021, 116–17.

⁸⁵ Some graves are seen as 'probable graves'. Most of these can probably be attributed to the tendency among older finds for the finders to prioritize items they perceived as valuable, such as gold.

⁸⁶ In Norwegian archaeology, the transition between the Migration period and the Merovingian period delineates the division between the Early and Late Iron Age.

⁸⁷ See Andersson 1995 on gold berlocks and dating.

⁸⁸ Amundsen 2021, 144–45.

⁸⁹ Kristoffersen 2000b, 149–55.

⁹⁰ 'Utility gold' is a translation of the Norwegian term 'nyttegull' (Amundsen 2021). Utility gold mostly consists of spiral rings of gold, but also rods and cut pieces from what are most likely spiral rings.

Table 6.3. Gender estimation of graves from the research areas. After Amundsen 2021, table 5.16.

	Rogaland	Vestfold	Østfold	Total
Female	43 (46%)	22 (63%)	14 (67%)	79 (53%)
Male	14 (15%)	6 (17%)	3 (14%)	23 (15%)
Without F/M gender marker	33 (35%)	7 (20%)	4 (19%)	44 (29%)
Female and male	4 (4%)	-	-	4 (3%)
Total	94 (100%)	35 (100%)	21 (100%)	150 (100%)

Table 6.4. Overview of gendered graves dated to period. Abbreviations: w.g.m – without female or male gender marker, F and M – female and male. After Amundsen 2021, table 5.18.

	Gender	RP	MP	RP/MP	MVP	Not dated	Total
Rogaland (94 graves)	Female	10 (56%)	29 (56%)	-	2 (67%)	2 (11%)	43 (46%)
	Male	1 (6%)	10 (19%)	1 (50%)	1 (33%)	1 (5%)	14 (15%)
	W.g.m	6 (33%)	11 (21%)	1 (50%)	-	15 (78%)	33 (35%)
	F and M	1? (6%)	2 (4%)	-	-	1 (5%)	4 (4%)
Total		18 (100%)	52 (100%)	2 (100%)	3 (100%)	19 (100%)	94 (100%)
Vestfold (35 graves)	Female	13 (81%)	9 (75%)	-	-	-	22 (63%)
	Male	2 (13%)	1 (8%)	-	-	3 (43%)	6 (17%)
	W.g.m	1 (6%)	2 (16%)	-	-	4 (57%)	7 (20%)
Total		16 (100%)	12 (100%)	-	-	7 (100%)	35 (100%)
Østfold (21 graves)	Female	10 (71%)	4 (80%)	-	-	-	14 (67%)
	Male	2 (14%)	-	-	-	-	2 (10%)
	W.g.m	2 (14%)	1 (20%)	-	-	2 (100%)	5 (24%)
Total		14 (100%)	5 (100%)	-	-	2 (100%)	21 (100%)

other studies of Iron Age graves in Norway.⁹¹ It should be noted that a substantial proportion of the graves containing gold have been disturbed. However, it is unlikely that the overall distribution of gender within these graves would have been significantly altered had this not been the case. Within the graves containing four or more artefacts of or with gold, the same trend can be observed — even more pronounced. Out of a total of fourteen graves, ten are classified as women's (71 per cent), two as men's (14 per cent), one as a possible double grave (7 per cent), and one is without gender markers (7 per cent).⁹² A notable cluster of these graves is located in Jæren, Rogaland.

The predominance of women's graves is evident in both the east and the west (Table 6.3). This pattern also holds true across time (Table 6.4). In the Roman period the proportion of women's graves is highest in the east (81 per cent in Vestfold and 71 per cent in Østfold), and remains significant also in the west (56 per cent in Rogaland). The primary distinction between graves during the Roman period lies between those

with clear gender markers as belonging to women and those without gender markers in Rogaland (Table 6.4).

The trend of a majority of women's graves is consistent in the Migration period (56 per cent in Rogaland, 75 per cent in Vestfold, and 80 per cent in Østfold). The percentage of men's graves in Rogaland is slightly higher than during the Roman period. Overall, there is a higher proportion of women's graves containing gold compared to men's graves, with a slightly stronger trend in east. This pattern is only disrupted by the twenty-eight undated graves, of which twenty-one do not have recognizable male/female gender markers.

It is possible to consider an indirect implication between men of power and *massive* gold objects. As explained above, I have also included items *with* gold in the analysis. Therefore, I have applied the same analytical approach exclusively to the graves that contain massive gold artefacts (Table 6.5). When considering graves with massive gold the dominance of women's graves slightly decreases in Rogaland, still, they are the majority. In Vestfold, the proportion of women's graves is almost equal during the Roman period, while there is a decrease in the Migration period (Table 6.5 versus Table 6.4). In Østfold, the numbers are similar to the Roman period, but also here there is a decrease during the Migration period. Nevertheless, the number

⁹¹ Such as Moen 2019a; (this volume).

⁹² Amundsen 2021, table 5.17.

Table 6.5. Overview of gendered graves with objects of massive gold, dated to period. After Amundsen 2021, table 5.19.

	Gender	RP		MP		RP/MP		MVP		Not dated		Total
Rogaland (71 graves)	Female	8	(47%)	17	(52%)	1	(100%)	-		2	(11%)	28 (24%)
	Male	2	(12%)	6	(18%)	-		1	(100%)	1	(5%)	10 (9%)
	W.g.m	6	(17%)	7	(21%)	-		-		15	(79%)	28 (24%)
	F and M	1	(6%)	3	(9%)	-		-		1	(5%)	5 (4%)
Total		17	(100%)	33	(100%)	1	(100%)	1	(100%)	19	(100%)	71 (100%)
Vestfold (28 graves)	Female	12	(80%)	4	(57%)	-		-		-		16 (57%)
	Male	2	(13%)	1	(14%)	-		-		2	(7%)	5 (18%)
	W.g.m	1	(7%)	2	(29%)	-		-		4	(15%)	7 (25%)
Total		15	(100%)	7	(100%)					6	(100%)	28 (100%)
Østfold (18 graves)	Female	10	(71%)	1	(50%)	-		-		-		11 (61%)
	Male	2	(14%)	-		-		-		-		2 (11%)
	W.g.m	2	(14%)	1	(50%)	-		-		2	(100%)	5 (28%)
Total		14	(100%)	2	(100%)					2	(100%)	18 (100%)

of graves containing massive gold in this region is too small — only two — to discern any trends. Therefore, the conclusion that gold occurs most frequently in women's graves stands firm, also when only including graves containing massive gold artefacts in the analysis (Table 6.5).

Following a binary male/female gender division, the objective in this study was to investigate whether the presence of gold within the burial material corresponded with the bigger societal narratives. The data clearly shows that the majority of individuals buried with gold were women, both in the Roman and Migration periods. This trend is consistent in three different areas, and therefore the prevalence of women's graves containing gold artefacts, whether massive or gilded, cannot be ignored.

Future Narratives?

What we really do is construct images of a past that is shaped by the archaeologists' own ideological and political perceptions in today's society [...] This means that there is no fixed past, it constantly changes partly based on new source material that is uncovered, partly based on the questions we ask of the material and the answers we desire, and partly based on our attitude towards people and society in general. It also means that we must be open to different interpretations of the past.⁹³

There are more Migration-period burials with gold that are recognized to be for women than there are for men. There has been since Bøe's 1926 overview. In

other words: this study has not shown anything that was not already known. So why my initial surprise of these findings? It has to do with my own situatedness, and my expectations after reviewing the literature where gold in graves has been a part of the material.⁹⁴ Although these women's graves were not unknown, when considering the modern narratives, they have rarely been actively discussed as a 'majority' within the burials of the upper echelons and inside different power dynamics. When the studies I read present the Migration period through a lens that favours male-dominated perspectives, that is also what I expect to find in the empirical evidence, in the archaeology. So even though, as shown earlier in this text, there are several studies that have dealt with societal structures of the Migration period and that have built their arguments on the material under discussion here, few really show the implication of these graves — the studies of Kristoffersen and Røstad being clear exceptions,⁹⁵ and their studies lay an important foundation for further exploration.

As becomes clear in the quote above, Myhre highlights the dangers of getting stuck in established narratives. And as shown earlier, Grønnesby uses Latour's black box concept to show the establishment of the chieftdom model as an established truth. Gold is widely acknowledged as an indicator of elite status in Iron Age societies, reflecting power. Yet, in scholarly literature, the concept of 'powerful women' is often met with scepticism or discomfort,⁹⁶ and women with gold seems to be a difficult conundrum to solve. In a recent article, Julie Lund, Martin Furholt, and Knut Ivar Austvoll reassess the use and understandings of 'power'

94 e.g., Myhre 1987; 1991; Ringstad 1992; Skre 1998; Reiersen 2017.

95 Kristoffersen 2000b; Røstad 2021.

96 Nelson 2002, 1.

93 Myhre 1991, 10, author's translation.

within archaeology.⁹⁷ They point out that power is often presented as something connected to the individual, and usually to men, in the form of ‘coercive power or domination’.⁹⁸ As shown, this is indeed often the case also within Migration-period research. Still, more recent studies such as Grønnesby’s⁹⁹ highlight the dormant potentials of studying social organization and power within the archaeological material of the Early Iron Age through different lenses. Another example is Lars Erik Gjerpe, who, based on the settlement material from eastern Norway, has developed a model of a hierarchical, non-state agricultural society that existed without rights anchored in territories.¹⁰⁰ He sees resistance in pre-state Iron Age societies to concentration of power and argues that power could rather have been divided among different community members.¹⁰¹ With this Gjerpe offers more nuanced perspectives on the roles associated with the elite and leadership echelons, although it can be noted that the representation of women in these roles is not explicitly addressed. Still, studies like this nuance the more conventional narratives and stories of the Migration period, and in doing so open them up to more diversity and possibilities.

My study adds to these discussions, by revealing a notable pattern wherein a higher number of women were buried with gold compared to men. It underscores

that if gold is to be regarded as a material indicator of wealth and power, these were undoubtedly rich and powerful individuals, their contributions within society should not and cannot be overlooked. This also, I think, has broader implications for understanding the significance of gold hoards from the Migration period in Scandinavia as part of the larger societal context. Dealing with modern stories surrounding distant pasts, the graves containing gold also underline the relevance of Haraway’s now thirty-six-year-old paper on situated knowledges; the importance of perspective and frames of references.¹⁰²

Acknowledgements

My sincere thanks to Unn Pedersen, Marianne Moen, and Ingrid Fuglestad, first of all for initiating the *Gendering the Nordic Past* project, and for including me in it. Thank you to all the project participants for the interesting discussions, inspiration, insights, and feedback during workshops and conference. I also wish to warmly thank the editors for inviting my contribution to this volume and their hard work along the way, and the anonymous peer reviewer for their insightful comments.

⁹⁷ Lund and others 2022.

⁹⁸ Lund and others 2022, 33.

⁹⁹ Grønnesby 2019.

¹⁰⁰ Gjerpe 2017.

¹⁰¹ Gjerpe 2017, 178–85.

¹⁰² Haraway 1988.

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7. Women, Warriors, and the Negotiation of Identity in Migration-Period Scandinavia

In this chapter, I will examine how jewellery played a part in the articulation and negotiation of identities in Migration-period Scandinavia (AD c. 400–550), by exploring this in relation to two different perceived groups: women and warriors. In archaeology, two separate narratives have been established that deal respectively with the role of women versus warriors in the construction and articulation of ethnic affiliation and group identity in this period. Accordingly, women have often been portrayed as bearers of a static ethnic identity that was ascribed at birth and remained unchanged from cradle to grave independent of individual life experiences. Warriors, on the other hand, have been assigned an identity that was flexible and enabled them to shift their ethnic affiliation by joining different mobile warrior bands or confederations. The research behind these contrasting presentations has basis in different concepts of phenomena like identity and ethnicity. I argue here that by applying a dynamic, contextual, and multidimensional concept of identity, it is possible to challenge the discrepancy that has occurred between the two research positions and arrive at a more nuanced and complex understanding of how the multifaceted phenomenon of ethnicity actually played out — and evolved — during the Migration period. By this approach, I will question the traditional perception of the role of women versus warriors in the articulation of identities in the Migration period, and demonstrate that both women and warriors played a previously unrecognized and active part in these ongoing negotiations of identity.

Background: The Creation of Two Different Stories — Women and Warriors in Migration-Period Ethnicity Studies

In early scholarship, research into ethnic groupings in the Migration period often assumed a direct link between specific object types and distinct groups of peoples known from historical sources. This applied especially to interpretations of jewellery and dress-accessories. Accordingly, migrations of groups such as for instance the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes from the Continent and Scandinavia to England, were often traced through the distribution of jewellery worn by women as part of what was conceived as an ethnic costume.¹ This research was usually implicitly based in a concept of ethnicity as a ‘primordial’ or biological identity that was perceived as innate and static in remaining the same independent of, or isolated from, the historical and social context, or individual life experiences of the person involved.²

From the late 1960s onward, this concept was rejected as social and anthropological studies promoted an understanding of the instrumental and situational aspects of ethnic identities in emphasizing the importance of cultural encounters and economic competition for generating ethnicity. In this approach, ethnicity was perceived as an aspect of social organization.³ As demonstrated by for instance Ian Hodder’s ethno-archaeological study *Symbols in Action*,⁴ the

¹ Fehr 2002, 195–96; Hakenbeck 2006, 12, 17; Røstad 2021a, 15–17.

² Effros 2004, 167, 174–75, 183; Hakenbeck 2006, 164.

³ e.g., Barth 1969b (ed.); 1969a.

⁴ Hodder 1982.

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degree of ethnic marking may be situation-dependent and individuals able to change their ethnic affiliation by, for instance, changing their costume. Consequently, a direct one-to-one relationship between a jewellery set or a particular type of dress-accessory representing an ethnic costume, and a one-dimensional ethnic identity as a member of a particular ethnic group, cannot be taken for granted. This awareness led to a general disillusionment in Migration-period archaeology concerning the possibilities of exploring ethnic relations through the means of dress-accessories and jewellery.⁵

Opposed to the conventional ethnicity studies that were often based on dress and jewellery, an instrumental and/or constructivist perspective of Migration-period ethnic groups came into vogue from the 1980s onward, influenced by sociological and anthropological studies. This approach promoted a completely different understanding of ethnic conditions in these centuries in that ethnic groups were perceived as social constructs.⁶ The main subject for study in this line of research was the peoples or tribal federations attested in early medieval written sources, and historians took a leading role, particularly those associated with the Vienna School of History.⁷ The Vienna School was grounded in the so-called *ethnogenesis model* in which historical groups of early medieval peoples, like for instance Goths and Franks, were regarded as tribal federations, generated by an amalgamation of warriors originating from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.⁸ As the warrior retinues and/or armies have been described in classical sources, they regarded themselves as a people with a common origin,⁹ indicating thereby that the warrior identity was ethnic.¹⁰ According to the ethnogenesis model, the ethnicity of the new tribal constellations was formed by the warriors adopting the ethnicity of the leaders, i.e., the king and the warrior aristocracy. The leaders represented 'core-traditions' (*Traditionskern*) of the federations, and a common identity was substantiated by shared myths of origin, language, and material culture.¹¹ As allegedly attested by historical sources, the warriors could change their ethnic affiliation by joining

different armies and thus becoming Frankish, Gothic, or Alemannic depending on the context.¹² Advocates of this theory often emphasized that ethnic identity in this period functioned as a means for the warriors to achieve political power, presenting a strongly politicized concept of ethnicity.¹³ According to the ethnogenesis model then, ethnicity is both situational and flexible, and a phenomenon that is generally triggered in a political situation.

The politicized and highly flexible notion of ethnicity and identity promoted through the ethnogenesis model has been questioned and criticized.¹⁴ The model has been said to reduce the concept of ethnicity to something synonymous with ethno-political identity and to a phenomenon that was limited to only a fraction of the populations belonging to a higher social rank. It has also been pointed out that the role of the remainder of the populations outside the warrior elite in the formation of ethnic groups is made invisible and that non-warrior members of society are indeed deprived of their ethnic identities.¹⁵ Despite such objections, the ethnogenesis theory has influenced archaeological research. In Migration-period archaeology, research has focused on warrior equipment, in particular weapons and belt fittings. This type of equipment is generally characterized by similarities over wide geographical areas.¹⁶ This pattern of distribution has been interpreted as evidence that warrior gear may have been actively used in the creation and manifestation of a super-regional warrior identity,¹⁷ although in a Scandinavian context, less emphasis has perhaps been placed on the question of whether or not this identity should be perceived as ethnic.

As noted, the different theoretical approaches represented in the conventional 'costume research' versus the studies influenced by the ethnogenesis model, have resulted in widely different representations of women's and warriors' respective roles in the construction and articulation of ethnic affiliations and group membership in the Migration period. While women have been perceived as passively and

5 Fehr 2002; Effros 2004, 170, 175.

6 e.g., Geary 1983; 2003; Halsall 1998; Heather 1998; Pohl (ed.) 1998b.

7 e.g., Herwig Wolfram, Walther Pohl, and Patrick Geary.

8 e.g., Steuer 1987, 190. This research was inspired by Reinhard Wenskus's *Stammesbildung und Verfassung: Das Werden der Frühmittelalterliche gentes* (1961).

9 Hedeager 1992, 282; Bowlus 2002, 245; Gillett 2002, 17; Pohl 2004, 23–24; Hakenbeck 2006, 159.

10 Geary 2003, 63.

11 Geary 1983, 22; 2003, 74–78; 108; 2006, 18–19; Hedeager 1992, 282; 2000, 48; Pohl 1998a, 3–4.

12 Geary 1983, 25; 2003, 84, 104–05; Pohl 1998a, 4; Kulikowski 2002, 83–84.

13 e.g., Pohl 1998a, 1–2.

14 See e.g., Gillett (ed.) 2002.

15 See e.g., Gillett 2002, 17; Effros 2004, 167; Røstad 2021a, 310.

16 e.g., Steuer 1987; Bemman and Hahne 1994, 353, 497; Siegmund 1998, 188–89; Kristoffersen 2000, 171, 188; Effros 2004, 171; Hakenbeck 2006, 160, 227; Ystgaard 2014, 130–32. There are however exceptions such as the 'Kvamme group', which according to Bemman and Hahne 1994, 320, 322 represents a distinct weapon-group of western Norway in the first phase of the Migration period.

17 Steuer 1987; Hedeager 1992, 294–95; Effros 2004, 171; Hakenbeck 2006, 227.

unconsciously reflecting a congenital and unchangeable ethnic identity, warriors are regarded as able to choose and manipulate their identities so that it can be used to achieve social advantage. An unintended consequence of these contrasting presentations is that warriors, most usually read as 'men', appear dynamic and mobile, while women seem passive with no possibilities to alter in reaction to a changing environment or in response to personal experiences.¹⁸ Even though the ethnogenesis model has been the subject of criticism,¹⁹ this forceful image of the Migration-period warrior persists. Moreover, the strong link between traditional research concerning costume and dress-accessories and an outdated notion of ethnicity has caused many to discard dress-accessories and dress as an object of research in ethnic studies all together.²⁰ The role of women in the formation and communication of group identities has consequently remained a neglected field. There are, however, exceptions, and that there is still potential for applying dress-accessories and jewellery successfully in ethnic studies when based on more updated concepts of ethnicity, is demonstrated in more recent works. The focus in these studies lies in the use of jewellery and dress in the construction of ethnic and social groupings, and costume is conceived as an active element in social interactions or negotiations between different social and ethnic groups.²¹ This alternative perspective shows that the jewellery and dress-accessories still have the potential to produce insights into cultural and ethnic relations in the Migration period.

Moreover, since weapon burials in several cases include jewellery that in this period predominantly are found in 'female' graves, for instance clasps, brooches, finger rings, beads, and pendants,²² dress-accessories may also provide the basis for an investigation of the warrior role. This archaeological evidence then may reveal potential additional aspects of this role other than the super-regional and ethno-political dimension that hitherto has been in focus, and may as such contribute to challenging and bridging the unnatural dichotomy that has formed between portrayals of Migration-period women versus warriors/men. On this basis, I will explore women's and warriors' respective use of dress-accessories in ethnic and social manifestations and negotiations through the occurrence of such items in graves.

Dress-Accessories, Gender Attribution, and Expressions of Identities in Burials: Some Considerations

My starting point is a multidimensional, dynamic, and contextual concept of identity where identities are conceived as composite, with different overlapping and interwoven levels that are formed and activated depending on the specific social contexts and experiences.²³ This approach implies that various aspects of an identity such as ethnicity, age, gender, social status, etc. intersect and accordingly cannot be easily separated from each other. An ethnic identity may be activated when people of different cultural traditions come into contact, and is negotiated and reproduced in opposition to specific cultural others through a continual and systematic communication of cultural divergence. The specific social context of the cultural encounter as well as existing power relations will influence the manifestation of ethnicity.²⁴ Clothing or costume is acknowledged as an important feature of ethnic, cultural, and social display.²⁵ Jewellery and dress-accessories, as components of dress, may as such serve as an analytical instrument for social and ethnic relations, and how ethnicity in the Migration period intersected with other social identities articulated by 'women' and 'warriors'.

Although more women than men wore dress-accessories, it cannot be assumed that *all* women in the Migration period wore jewellery. It is furthermore conceivable that some men outside of a warrior class also wore jewellery and dress-accessories. It should therefore be noted that in what follows, references to 'women' do not indicate an all-comprising category of women, but to women — and possibly some men — equipped with jewellery. It is often implicitly assumed that Migration-period warriors were synonymous with men, but this was not necessarily the case, as the presence of female warriors has been recognized in both historical and archaeological sources.²⁶ Even though female warriors have so far only been attested in Scandinavia during the Viking period, it seems reasonable to assume that they were also present in the Migration period as this is known from other areas in northern Europe in this period.²⁷ Moreover, while more men than women were warriors, not all men were

18 Effros 2004, 174–75, 183; Hakenbeck 2006, 120.

19 Cf. above and see also e.g., Fehr 2002; Gillett 2002; Kulikowski 2002.

20 Halsall 1998, 151; Fehr 2002, 199; Gillett 2002, 3–4; Effros 2004, 156, 170–75.

21 e.g., Hakenbeck 2004; 2006; Martin 2015; Røstad 2021a.

22 Røstad 2021a, 269; 2021b, tables 38–39.

23 Jones 1997; 2007; Weldon 2008.

24 Jones 1997, 95–100; Eriksen 2002, 3, 12–13.

25 See e.g., Hodder 1982; Bourdieu 1995, 12–121, 135–37, 191–98; Eicher (ed.) 1999b; Sørensen 2004, 128–42.

26 Lucy 1997; Pohl 2004; Geary 2006, 26–34; Hedenstierna-Jonson and others 2017; Welton 2018, 216–17.

27 e.g., Lucy 1997 and Welton 2018, 216–17.

warriors. Warriors included men — and most likely certain women — in a specific social role.

Regarding determination of sex or gender of the graves included in the examination, a scarcity and/or high fragmentation of skeletal remains means that the material evidence is not sexed, but that female and male gender is attributed archaeologically through association with several items of jewellery and textile implements, versus weaponry respectively. Although discrepancies do occur,²⁸ a general correlation between biological sex and these items is corroborated by studies from regions where human remains are better preserved.²⁹ However, biological sex cannot automatically be equated with social gender, and the notion of a simple binary sexual division is also problematic.³⁰ This traditional attribution of gender still serves as a starting point and underlying premise, but it is not a main concern in the following examination. The point is rather that jewellery and weaponry articulated aspects of various social roles and entangled identities, and the aim is to study the function of jewellery in this particular context in more detail.

Archaeologically, warriors are identified through weapons and weapon-related artefacts such as fittings from weapons, weapon-belts, sheaths, or scabbards. When found in burials, these are usually interpreted as expressing a warrior identity or role, but to assume a direct relationship in that the weapons directly reflected the deceased's status as a warrior while living is nevertheless problematic. This is demonstrated by a sixth-century burial under Cologne Cathedral of a six-year-old boy equipped with a full set of weapons,³¹ and related instances where physical traits reveal that the deceased would not have been able to participate in fighting or martial activities.³² Likewise, jewellery found in a female grave cannot be regarded as directly mirroring the deceased woman's identity or social rank. Nevertheless, some connection may be expected to exist between the objects deposited in the grave and the deceased, as such expressions did not emerge in a cultural void.³³ Arguably, the society reproduced itself in ideal terms through the burial rite, and consequently the deceased was furnished with those identities and key roles that were perceived as significant to maintain social order. If this was so, it follows that it also was possible to manipulate and challenge that order through

the burial situation.³⁴ From this premise, mortuary evidence may be explored as expressions of identities.

Jewellery in Female Burials and Expressions of Identity

To examine the occurrence and significance of jewellery in weapon graves, it is necessary first to consider the general distribution of jewellery in this period. This will be exemplified through the geographical, contextual, and chronological distribution of three types of jewellery which are among the most common types in Scandinavia in the Migration period: cruciform brooches, clasps, and relief brooches (Fig. 7.1). When these types are found in graves, they are mainly associated with women and conceived as elements of a female costume/dress (cf. above).³⁵ Each of the three types can be divided into several subtypes or variants, many of which are restricted to specific regions or districts, while others have a super-regional distribution.³⁶ The geographical distribution patterns are both complex and transient. Some subtypes partly overlap within certain areas, while others do not, and the regions and areas that are marked out through these patterns change throughout the Migration period. Also the social context of the types varies in that some types or certain subtypes occur in richly equipped graves that usually are ascribed to an uppermost strata of society. Others are associated both with richly and more modestly furnished burials.³⁷

The distribution patterns indicate that the three types of dress-accessory, as part of the female costume, played an active role in a continuous negotiation of identities, and that the costume acquired a function as an instrument in an ethnic discourse.³⁸ In this discourse, female dress may have functioned as a coded sensory system of non-verbal communication through which different dimensions of composite identities were generated, articulated, and transformed.³⁹ Social and political conditions could trigger either the material expression or the disappearance of shared identities at local, regional, and pan-Scandinavian levels.⁴⁰ In some instances, the marking of a common regional and ethnic group identity coincides with economic and political territorial units defined in earlier research.

²⁸ e.g., Bennett 1987, 102.

²⁹ Røstad 2021a, 34 with references.

³⁰ e.g., Sørensen 1992; 2004, 42–52; Solli 2002, 94.

³¹ Werner 1964, 206–07; Hartmann 2013, 25.

³² Härke 1990.

³³ e.g., Sørensen 1997, 101; Lund and Moen 2019, 142–43; Røstad 2021a, 33–34.

³⁴ Härke 1990; Parker Pearson 1993, 226–27; Kristoffersen 2000, 19–21; Hakenbeck 2004, 41; Díaz-Andreu 2005, 39.

³⁵ Only thirteen Migration-period weapon burials include cruciform brooches, see Røstad 2021a, 275.

³⁶ Røstad 2021a, 80–175.

³⁷ Røstad 2021a, 80–175, 235–46.

³⁸ Røstad 2021a, 249–64.

³⁹ Eicher 1999a, 1.

⁴⁰ Røstad 2021a, 280–88, 290–97.



Figure 7.1. Three common jewellery types in Scandinavia in the Migration period. From left: cruciform brooch, relief brooch, and wrist clasps. Photo: Kirsten Helgeland and Ellen C. Holte, © Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo, CC BY-SA 4.0.

Such territories have been defined on the basis of a combination of several different factors including centres with favourable agricultural conditions and a strategic position, the clustering of monumental grave mounds, as well as gold items and imported objects like glass and bronze vessels.⁴¹ However, the boundaries between these units were not reflected in the distribution of female dress-accessories throughout the entire Migration period, but only occurred in the middle phase of that period, partly to disappear again in the last phase. Moreover, the political situation with processes of centralization and ongoing power struggles between neighbouring polities also appears to have influenced the materialized marking of ethnic groups through female dress and vice versa.⁴² This indicates that like the warriors, the ethnicity of women also had a political aspect in this period.

The identities that women manifested through the use of dress and dress-accessories were also dynamic and negotiable in that what groupings were emphasized apparently changed continually in response to altered political and historical conditions.⁴³ At the beginning of the Migration period, in the first half of the fifth century, the spatial distribution of the three jewellery types partially overlapped, and the situation was characterized by common forms being found over large areas in western Scandinavia, with only a slight tendency for specific variants to become restricted to particular regions. The distribution cut across various Scandinavian political and economic territories.⁴⁴ The manifesting of identity through the female costume thus appears to have been linked primarily to supra-regional levels in this phase.⁴⁵ In view of the political situation in the first half of the fifth century, this pattern may perhaps reflect a common western Scandinavian identity-manifestation in opposition to the cultural 'others' represented by the inhabitants of the Roman Empire to the south and west. Simultaneously, the ethnic lines of division may also have concerned ethnic marking towards Saami populations and ethnic boundaries in the interior and in the north of the Scandinavian peninsula.⁴⁶

This picture contrasts sharply with what appeared in the following phase of the Migration period, in the second half of the fifth century, when the quantity of dress-accessories increased substantially and a number of specifically local and regional variants of clasps, cruciform brooches, and relief brooches occurred all over Scandinavia, now including the eastern regions

as well. The geographical distribution patterns were complex, however, as several common forms of clasps and brooches were in use over large areas of Scandinavia at the same time as certain areas also had their own peculiar variants or subtypes.⁴⁷ Although the manifestation of super-regional identities were still maintained,⁴⁸ the focus in the social discourse seems to have been on regional groupings in this phase. Some of the regions that were marked out by jewellery coincided with certain Scandinavian polities,⁴⁹ i.e., political and economic territorial entities located, e.g., in Jutland in Denmark, the Götaland and Mälaren regions in Sweden, and along the southern and western Norwegian coastline.⁵⁰ The regional manifestation continued to a certain degree in the concluding phase of the Migration period, in the first half of the sixth century, but there was both a reduction in the overall quantity of jewellery items and in the number of different types. One of the most numerous types, the cruciform brooch, now went out of use. While some of the same regions as in the preceding phase were reproduced through the use of specific types or variants of clasps and relief brooches, the marking of other districts disappeared whereas some previously unmarked regions emerged.⁵¹

The immediate burial contexts of the selected jewellery demonstrate that relief brooches, cruciform brooches, and clasps often occurred in combination, worn by the same individual woman. Furthermore, distinct regional subtypes were often combined with super-regional types or variants.⁵² This may be exemplified through a grave assemblage from Falkum in Telemark that contained both a relief brooch belonging to a variant spread in north-western Scandinavia, and a pair of cruciform brooches of a regional subtype distributed in Telemark and two neighbouring counties, Vestfold and Agder in southern Norway. In accordance with a multidimensional and intersectional concept of identity, this is interpretable as a set of dress-accessories that manifested different levels of identity. From such a perspective, the relief brooch symbolized affiliation to a 'super-regional' group in north-western Scandinavia, while the cruciform brooches implied a regional grouping focused upon Vestfold, Telemark, and Agder in southern Norway.⁵³ The super-regional identity that was made manifest by means of the relief brooch was presumably also linked to connections within an upper social strata, since such brooches were worn by women

41 See e.g., Myhre 1987; Hedeager 1990; Ramqvist 1991.

42 Røstad 2021a, 280–88.

43 Røstad 2021a.

44 Røstad 2021a, 235–83.

45 Røstad 2021a, 251.

46 Røstad 2021a, 290–97.

47 Røstad 2021a, 238–46.

48 Røstad 2021a, 251.

49 Røstad 2021a, 245–88.

50 See e.g., Myhre 1987; Ramqvist 1991; Näsman 2006, 220.

51 Røstad 2021a, 242–46, 285–88.

52 Røstad 2021a, 252–64.

53 Røstad 2021a, 252–55.



Figure 7.2. Jewellery found in weapon graves. Photo: Svein Skare, © University Museum, University of Bergen, CC BY-SA 4.0.

who belonged to a high rank in society.⁵⁴ Features of the Falkum relief brooch have, furthermore, also been identified which connect this specimen more closely to other relief brooches in this region than to the wider group of relief brooches.⁵⁵ This special design can also be regarded as a means of expressing a local identity. In this way, not only a set of jewellery, but also one single dress-accessory could manifest composite identities, depending on the immediate social context in which the dress was worn.

Dress-accessories as costume components thus represented the potential to express group-affiliation in a complex manner by allowing one and the same individual to simultaneously express connections with different entities at a range of levels. Cruciform brooches, clasps, and relief brooches however represent only a selection of the jewellery that was in use in the Migration period, and so provides only a partial insight into the use of dress-accessories for the purpose of articulating and negotiating identities within Scandinavia. Their patterns of use nonetheless reveal general tendencies

with regards to how the phenomenon of composite identities played out in this period.

Dress-Accessories in Weapon Burials

Weapon graves are defined here as graves that comprise swords, seaxes, spears, shields, and/or fittings from such or weapon belts, axes, or arrowheads, and which in addition contain no evidence of double interment. As noted above, weapon graves may include dress-accessories that are usually associated with female burials. Here, I will examine the occurrence of one such type in Scandinavian weapon burials: clasps. Several of the graves that comprise clasps include additional jewellery types like brooches, beads, finger rings, and gold pendants,⁵⁶ and these will also form part of the following discussion (Fig. 7.2).

Out of a total of 506 Scandinavian burials including clasps, forty-six may be defined as weapon graves.⁵⁷ The most common clasps found in these graves are super-regional types in Scandinavia and/or the Scandinavian

⁵⁴ Kristoffersen 2000, 105–06, 210; Røstad 2021a, 250.

⁵⁵ Meyer 1935, 9–11.

⁵⁶ Røstad 2021b, table 38.

⁵⁷ Røstad 2021a, 270; 2021b, table 38.

peninsula: button clasps with undecorated/plain buttons, with ring designs or Style I decorations. These types occur in twenty-eight finds of which seventeen are of the plain button variant. Only ten weapon graves contain regional clasp types, i.e., types with regionally more limited distributions pertaining to specific areas of Scandinavia.⁵⁸ This means that the dress of the warrior was mainly equipped with clasp types that were shared over wide areas, something that agrees well with the fact that the warriors' weapon-belts and accoutrements were also super-regional (cf. above).

All the burials that contained regionally specific clasp types included swords, and a majority included items of gold and/or imported glass vessels, which mark them out as high-status burials.⁵⁹ This involves two of the most richly furnished graves of the Scandinavian Migration period overall; the weapon graves from Snartemo in Vest-Agder, Norway (grave II) and Högom in Medelpad, Sweden (barrow 2). Both these graves are usually interpreted as the burials of chieftains or petty kings.⁶⁰ By contrast, the burials with the super-regional plain button clasps are nearly all relatively modestly furnished and few include a sword as part of the armament. It should furthermore be noted that the main part of the weapon graves with clasps that can be dated more precisely, date to the last two phases of the Migration period; i.e., phases when the clasps had become an integral and standardized part of the female dress.⁶¹ I will return to this below.

What the contexts reveal then, are that when clasps occurred in weapon graves, they were frequently associated with richly furnished graves and a high social class. This was particularly the case with those finds that incorporated clasps of distinct regional types. It was, moreover, not the clasps alone that were used to decorate the costume in these rich grave finds: there were other items of jewellery such as gold finger rings, gold pendants, and belt-sets worn by the warriors. Several of these, e.g., belt-sets, gold finger rings, gold A-bracteates, and looped solidi, are types with a trans-regional distribution. Moreover, finger rings, coins pendants, and bracteates of gold are commonly interpreted as status symbols expressing an elite identity.⁶² However, the majority of the finds with simple plain button

clasps as the only clasp type present were *not* especially well furnished in respect of high-status artefacts such as imported items and/or gold. The use of clasps of this type thus does not appear to have been linked to an exceptionally high social group.⁶³ The preference for undecorated clasps on the other hand, may be connected with the manifestation of a super-regional identity. This can possibly be regarded as the expression of a need for a more 'open' or dynamic identity in the context of the warrior role, an aspect of this role that has been emphasized in earlier research (cf. above). Moreover, the use of super-regional weapon gear may in certain instances be traced back to the previous period, as evidenced by booty offerings in southern Scandinavia from the Roman Iron Age,⁶⁴ indicating that this particular dimension of the warrior role had also been of importance in earlier periods.

Several of the richly equipped weapon graves contained more than one type of clasp, such as grave 3 at Viken on Lovö in Uppland, Sweden, which had three different types of button clasp: two common Scandinavian clasp types, the plain type and the type with ring designs, as well as a type with domed buttons that has a marked eastern Swedish distribution. This has been explained as an indication that several garments had been laid in the grave and consequently as representing status.⁶⁵ However, in accordance with what I argue above in the case of the Falkum burial and other similar contexts where individual women wore diverse types and variants of jewellery, the use of different clasp types may have manifested multidimensional identities for the warriors interred. The man from Viken may thus have articulated both a common Scandinavian and an eastern Scandinavian identity through his clasps. The chieftain or petty king from Högöm was wearing four different subtypes of clasp: two common Scandinavian clasp types with a ring design and a dot-in-ring punchmark respectively, together with a clasp with spiral ornament that is characteristic of the Mälars region and the domed button type that is common to both the Mälars region and Gotland. In his case, the clasps could have been used not only to reinforce a common Scandinavian identity as a warrior but also concurrently to emphasize his connections with the area to the south and south-east of Medelpad. In this regard, a further significant point is that several of the grave finds with distinct regional clasp types also have common Scandinavian types. This is the case for six finds out of ten. It thus appears to have been especially important to present super-regional identity (or identities) in the weapon

58 Røstad 2021b, table 38. Of the remaining eight finds, seven contained unclassifiable button clasps, while one find included a combination of undecorated button clasps and clasps of an individualistic form with bar. For more details, see Røstad 2021b, supplement to tables 28–30, Graves with clasps from phase D2a/D2b <<http://urn.nb.no/URN:NBN:no-86140>>.

59 Røstad 2021b, table 38.

60 Ramqvist 1992; Kristoffersen 2000.

61 Røstad 2021a, 313.

62 Bursche 2001, 95–98; Effros 2003, 147.

63 See also Bennett 1987, 110.

64 Pauli Jensen 2011.

65 Bennett 1987, 109–10.

graves. As noted, this is corroborated not only by weapons and belt fittings, but also by additional items of jewellery appearing in these graves. Near identical tablet-woven braids from the graves of Högom and the high-status weapon burial at Enebø in western Norway also suggest that the material and the cut of the dress were a common denominator for the uppermost rank of the warrior aristocracy.⁶⁶

Jewellery Practice of Warriors and Women

Two main trends appear in the use of clasps and other items of jewellery in relation to the social role of the warriors in the Migration period. To begin with, in a broader social stratum within the warrior class it is primarily a super-regional affiliation that is expressed through the use of common Scandinavian clasp types. Secondly, the use of regionally restricted clasp types in expressing cultural or ethnic regional manifestation is mainly associated with burials where the social status of the deceased was particularly high. The general preference among warriors for super-regional clasp types may mean that the role of a warrior was acted out predominantly at a super-regional cultural or ethnic level with reference to potential membership of a warrior group or warrior band. As noted earlier, this is to a certain extent reflected in the use of homogeneous weaponry in both Scandinavia and other 'Germanic' areas (cf. above). In the case of the higher social tiers, however, the use of 'regional' clasp types on the warrior's costume may indicate that it was desirable that the manifestation should resonate with the regional costume components that were found recurrently in women's dress. As noted above, in these last two phases of the Migration period such regional variants or components corresponded to a certain degree with specific Scandinavian polities. This could mean that affiliation or association with a regional grouping was not only an aspect of the warrior's identity in a particular social role amongst the upper social echelons. It could potentially also be linked to the alleged politicization of ethnicity that took place in the Migration period.⁶⁷

The articulation of ethnic and cultural identity that was interwoven with warrior identity thus appears to have been mainly connected to a super-regional level. In this regard, it is noteworthy that clasps found in contemporary weapon-booty hoards in southern Scandinavia were also of common Scandinavian varieties. One exception is however a find of a regional clasp

type from Ejsbøl mose that was part of a fifth-century 'substitute deposit'. These particular deposits contained several objects of 'princely' character and supposedly represented the sacrifice of the officers' or warrior leaders' gear.⁶⁸ This potentially supports the conclusion that it was predominantly among the leading ranks of society that the warriors' ethnic or cultural regional affiliation was an aspect to which attention was drawn. This apparently agrees with what can be inferred from contemporary documentary sources on the Continent, where ethnicity was a phenomenon that was only articulated among royalty or the aristocracy.⁶⁹

If we compare the use of jewellery by warriors as it appears in weapon graves of this period with the patterns identified above concerning how jewellery appears in female burials, it would seem that in both cases the relationship between social hierarchical identity, gender, and ethnicity operated at several different levels. Combinations of regional and super-regional types of dress-accessory occurred in both contexts, as did jewellery which functioned as a marker of social status. This implies that both women and warriors expressed different and partly intersecting levels of identity concurrently. While the warrior elite may have monopolized an ethno-political identity within that particular section of Migration-period society represented by the warrior class, the fact that the main part of the jewellery is associated with female burials indicates that a broad spectrum of the female population partook in the articulation and negotiation of Scandinavian polities. Moreover, it is of importance that the warriors made use of the same jewellery as the women did, and that such items of dress-accessory must have been associated particularly with women in this period and thus consciously referenced female dress. This indicates a mutual influence and interplay between these different groupings, and shows that the warrior retinues and federations did not operate entirely independently from the ethnic regional groupings that were mostly articulated through female costume.

Concerning the super-regional and flexible ethnic identity of the warriors that enabled them to make ethnic shifts, this phenomenon was arguably restricted to men — and women — when operating in a warrior role, and not men in general, as is sometimes implicitly implied. Only a minority was most likely able to sustain a lifestyle that enabled them to live as warriors permanently.⁷⁰ This probably concerned only certain members of the warrior aristocracy, while others acted in this role merely during particular parts of the year or

⁶⁶ Nockert 1991; Ramqvist 1995, 154.

⁶⁷ Pohl 1998b; cf. above.

⁶⁸ Ørsnes 1984, 43; 1988, 25–26, 105.

⁶⁹ Geary 1983.

⁷⁰ Evans 1997, 1, 56–68.

in a specific period of their lives. For example, farmers may have acted as warriors for periods of time, before eventually returning to agriculture, as appears to have been common practice in Viking Age Scandinavia, according to saga literature. Some men and women may at times have joined warrior bands on expeditions and contributed in conflicts between neighbouring areas in Scandinavia.⁷¹ Others may have participated in wars on the Continent as Roman soldiers, later returning home to their areas of origin, as has been suggested for the warrior interred at Evebø in western Norway in the fifth century.⁷² It seems reasonable to assume that when a person stepped out of the particular warrior role, a local and regional ethnic identity as e.g., Ryge, Egde, Trønder, Geat, Svear, Jute, or Dane was reactivated.⁷³

Conclusions

In this chapter, I have explored dress-accessories and jewellery as actively involved in ethnic and social articulation and negotiations in Migration-period

Scandinavia. The contextual and spatial distribution patterns of the selected items of jewellery show how cultural and ethnic lines of division continuously changed, and testify to complex social discourses taking place simultaneously at various levels. I have argued that dress with its associated items of jewellery and dress-accessories constituted a complex social field in which different levels of identity acquired relevance and were formed and activated in response to different situations at different points in time. While in earlier research Migration-period women were often attributed a passive role in identity formation and transformation, the jewellery evidence indicates that both women and warriors actively contributed to continuously ongoing negotiations of identity. Migration-period ethnicity has proven to be a multifaceted phenomenon that intersected with gender roles, and in certain situations intertwined with political and hierarchical identities. The use of dress-accessories by 'warriors' and 'women' respectively suggests a dynamic and interplay between these social categories that ultimately contributed to the formation of Scandinavian polities.

⁷¹ Hedeager 1990, 140–41, 203–06; Näsman 2006, 218–20.

⁷² Solberg 1996, 30.

⁷³ These represent regional identities articulated in contemporary Continental and Anglo-Saxon written sources that to a certain extent are traceable in the material culture of the period (cf. e.g., Røstad 2021a).

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The Viking Age

8. Another Story?

Returning to the Oseberg Ship Burial

In the autumn of 2017, a discovery was published in the *American Journal of Physical Anthropology*: aDNA analysis showed that the body buried in one of Scandinavia's best-known warrior graves was genetically female, not male, as had previously been taken for granted.¹ This new knowledge attracted a lot of media attention across the world and was widely discussed. Some scholars expressed scepticism and brought forward highly relevant reservations, such as the possibility of finds having been muddled up, or that the person interred might have lived as a man.² All the same, these criticisms were unexpectedly critical and exacting. Burials are often interpreted as men's and women's graves on far more insecure foundations.³ Does this mean that scholarly circles are reluctant to recognize different gender roles to those which have shaped the narratives of the Viking Age?

This new discovery also illustrates how we may find it difficult to see what is right in front of us when it conflicts with conventional assumptions. The feminine features of that skeleton had indeed been noted before,⁴ yet without consequence, before the aDNA results emerged. How many other women may then have been overlooked? It is well documented that both popular and academic representations of the Viking Age (c. AD 800–1050) are heavily influenced by nineteenth-century ideals,⁵ even after decades of feminist theory and critiques.⁶ There is also a broad

consensus that representations of the era are shaped by considerably later written sources composed by Christian men, including Snorri Sturluson (1179–1241) with his definite political agenda.⁷ My attention, however, is not directed at overlooked women; quite the opposite. Here I will discuss a grave recognized as a woman's burial ever since its excavation in 1904: the spectacular and well-preserved ship burial from Oseberg in which two women were laid to rest in the year AD 834.⁸ The elaborate grave and its occupants have received a great deal of attention, but I will begin by illustrating that the conservatism in scholarly writing on Oseberg has continued into our present century. The role of these women in power politics has, remarkably, scarcely been touched upon. Later, I will discuss whether scholars have failed to observe *which* features of Oseberg bear witness to power and influence.

Research History in Retrospect: Another Story

That the interpretations of the Oseberg ship burial have been shaped by gender stereotypes has been pointed out by many,⁹ most comprehensively by Elisabeth Arwill-Nordbladh, who analysed its research history up to the beginning of the 1990s.¹⁰ What is most remarkable is illustrated with astonishing clarity in a comparison of the ship burials from Oseberg and Gokstad,¹¹ the latter

¹ Hedenstierna-Jonson and others 2017.

² e.g., Jesch 2017; Williams 2017; Androshchuk 2018.

³ As discussed by Moen 2019b, 211–14 with references; Price and others 2019 with references.

⁴ Hedenstierna-Jonson and others 2017, 587.

⁵ Mandt 1992; Arwill-Nordbladh 1998b.

⁶ Moen 2011; 2019a.

⁷ e.g., Koth 1914; Myhre 1992b; Helle 2011.

⁸ Brøgger and others 1917.

⁹ Dommasnes 1992, 2; Mandt 1992; Arwill-Nordbladh 1998b; Pedersen 2008; Moen 2011.

¹⁰ Arwill-Nordbladh 1998b.

¹¹ As earlier discussed by Mandt 1992, 93–100; Pedersen 2008.

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Figure 8.1. The archaeologist Gabriel Gustafson (fourth from left) and other members of the multidisciplinary team pose during the excavations at Oseberg in 1904. Photo: O. Væring © Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo, CC BY-SA 4.0.

with an osteologically sexed male. The two burials have many features in common. Oseberg, however, has been interpreted in quite a different way from Gokstad and other monumental Viking Age graves with interred men. The man buried at Gokstad around AD 900–905,¹² has consistently been referred to as a king, a petty king, a chieftain, or the leader of some polity,¹³ while scholars have been extremely reticent to consider the women in the Oseberg mound as politically active.

Most scholars have distinguished a leading and a subordinate individual in the Oseberg grave.¹⁴ When the leading woman has been portrayed as a queen, it is in roles such as housewife, widow, and/or mother of the king, and not as one who rules.¹⁵ In the early twentieth century, leading individuals, like the man buried at Gokstad, came to be identified with characters named in literary sources, in keeping with the normal practice of the time. The influential archaeologist A. W. Brøgger concluded that Oseberg might have been constructed for Queen Åsa, the only queen mentioned in *Ynglingatal* and known from Snorri's *Heimskringla*.¹⁶

Åsa is described as powerful, but only in roles such as consort, widow queen, or queen mother. She is thus defined in relationship to others, as an object rather than a subject, as Gro Mandt emphasized in 1992.¹⁷ Both Mandt and Arwill-Nordbladh have demonstrated how interpretations of Oseberg have been shaped by men under the influence of the predominant gender ideology and aesthetic at the end of the nineteenth and in the early twentieth centuries (Fig. 8.1).¹⁸ It was precisely in the second half of the nineteenth century that the Viking Age was constructed, as Jørgen Haavardsholm has shown, replacing concepts such as 'the saga age' and 'the old age' (*oldtid*), and putting an equals sign between 'Viking' and 'he'.¹⁹

The Oseberg find, with its two women buried within a Viking ship, could in theory, have challenged that construct, especially because those who were responsible for the burial did not disguise the fact that the deceased were women. Already during the excavations, before the examination of the human remains, Gabriel Gustafson noted that the grave-goods implied a woman's grave.²⁰ He stressed that Oseberg was even more richly furnished than Gokstad, and found

12 Nicolaysen 1882; Bonde and Christensen 1993.

13 Gustafson 1906, 130; Brøgger 1916, 54–55; Brøgger and Shetelig 1950, 54–55; Gansum 1997.

14 e.g., Gustafson 1906, 132; Brøgger and Shetelig 1950, 90; Ingstad 1992, 224–26; Androshchuk 2005; Pedersen 2008; Bill 2016, 142.

15 Gustafson 1906, 132; Brøgger 1916, 50; Shetelig 1920, 2, 331.

16 Brøgger 1916, 50–52; 1919, 238; Shetelig 1920, 331.

17 Mandt 1992.

18 Mandt 1992; Arwill-Nordbladh 1998b.

19 Haavardsholm 2004.

20 Gustafson 1906, 130–32.

this particularly interesting, because it is a woman's grave. All the same, he was content to describe its occupant as a 'special woman, the wife or daughter of a chieftain, we might well say a queen', in contrast to the chieftain at Gokstad.

The markedly different interpretations of Oseberg and Gokstad can be traced through the history of research, and are striking when, around the turn of the millennium, minor differences between two very similar ship burials were used to downplay the significance of Oseberg,²¹ as I have noted before.²² Its location in the landscape was used to claim that Oseberg is anti-monumental, and belongs outside the martial-political sphere, while Gokstad is the monument of the leader of a political institution.²³ This is to attach a great deal of significance to the topographical position of two monumental burial mounds with very similar grave-goods.²⁴ That there are such clear differences in positioning has also been rejected by Marianne Moen.²⁵

The association with Queen Åsa was subsequently abandoned as a result of critical assessments of the sources,²⁶ while the interpretation of the leading individual in Oseberg as a consort was kept.²⁷ The view of her as a piece in someone else's political game endured, for instance in the role of princess,²⁸ or daughter married off.²⁹ Others have chosen not to characterize her role any more precisely than a woman of high rank.³⁰ She has been explicitly written off as a symbol of political power, on the basis that 'kings, jarls and chieftains were men, not women.'³¹ This was stated without any notable reflection upon the fact that the sources which such men are known from are often much later texts offering selective presentations of factual circumstances, produced in male-dominated milieux, and after the process of Christianization had changed gender roles in Scandinavia.³²

That Oseberg and Gokstad do have a lot in common is shown beyond doubt when the artefacts and other

material traces are focused upon.³³ This relates to a range of aspects from very general features such as the monumental burial mounds, inhumation burial in ships, a burial chamber constructed *in situ*, and ostentatious rituals involving animal sacrifice, to details like the beds, tent, and cooking equipment. Bodies sexed as respectively female and male is the main difference, along with textile-working tools in Oseberg, suggesting that the buried were gendered as women. The large barrows with their contents *are* material demonstrations of power, and it is reasonable to identify those buried in the ship graves as individuals who had great power, including political power, irrespective of their gender.³⁴ The women's grave was indeed treated just like the Gokstad mound in the second half of the tenth century: it was reopened, a process which itself can be counted as a demonstration of power and appropriation of the quality of the dead.³⁵ There are also numerous examples of women who had political power in both historical and prehistoric times, including the era of the Oseberg women itself, when Empress Irene (AD 797–802) assumed power in Byzantium.³⁶ At least one of the women in Oseberg therefore was a ruler.³⁷ In recent years, there has been a growing recognition that Oseberg was part of the political scene,³⁸ but it is extraordinary that this is only emerging now, a century after the excavation.

A lively debate in an international women's meeting in 1911 about how far this might be a matter of a reigning queen, listened to and reported by the man responsible for the excavations at Oseberg, Gabriel Gustafson,³⁹ had no impact on the development of scholarship. It seems reasonable to regard much later creative attempts to include a man in the grave with its two female skeletons as (rather desperate?) attempts to maintain the narrative in which political power was restricted to men.⁴⁰ It is both striking and disheartening that as

21 Gansum 1997.

22 Pedersen 2008.

23 Gansum 1997.

24 Pedersen 2008, 588.

25 Moen 2011; see also Ingstad 1992, 226.

26 Gjessing 1943, 105–18; Myhre 1992a, 41, 274.

27 Ingstad 1992, 227–29.

28 Skre 2007, 467; see also Hadley and Richards 2021, 20.

29 Bill 2020, 377–78.

30 Bill 2016.

31 Rothe 1994, 148–49 (trans.).

32 Still, as Mona Ringvej 2022 has demonstrated, obviously missing information can provide a way into untold stories. Leaving previous assumptions behind, combining the information available, and reading between the lines, she can present the fascinating life history of the twelfth-century queen Ingrid, while still sharing with a wide audience the interpretative challenges and choices involved.

33 Based on Nicolaysen 1882; Brøgger and others 1917; 1920; Brøgger and Shetelig 1927; 1928; Christensen and others 1992; Arwill-Nordbladh 1998b; Pedersen 2008, 589; Cannell 2021.

34 Wamers 2002, 156; Pedersen 2008, 589; Moen 2011; Pedersen 2017.

35 Bill and Daly 2012, with references; Klevnäs 2016.

36 Pedersen 2008; 2017 with references; see also Lull and others 2021.

37 Pedersen 2008; Moen 2011; Pedersen 2017.

38 Sigurdsson 2017, 109–13, but without reference to Mandt 1992, Arwill-Nordbladh 1998b, Pedersen 2008, or Moen 2011. See also Jarman 2021, 129–30; Gjerpe 2023, 131.

39 Arwill-Nordbladh 1998a.

40 Ingstad 1992, 252; Androshchuk 2005. To Ingstad, the presence of the king is symbolic, while Androshchuk imagines that the man's remains were ritually removed in connection with the reopening of the barrow. Both attach importance to the presence of a saddle which is taken to have been restricted to men, Androshchuk also

recently as 2015,⁴¹ such an eccentric and speculative suggestion, one which downplays the two women, was given space when Oseberg is briefly presented for a general readership. In view of the progress of gender equality in Scandinavia from the 1970s onwards, and the steadily more frequent presence of women in positions of the highest authority, it is reasonable to conclude that the presentations of Oseberg around the turn of the millennium were *little* impacted by contemporary currents, in contrast to the situation at the turn of the previous century. It is also striking how little the feminist critique of Mandt, Arwill-Nordbladh, and others has influenced interpretations of the ship burials.

New interpretations of Oseberg have not affected understandings of Gokstad either. From the middle of the twentieth century onwards, archaeologists and historians of religion have convincingly argued that the leading individual in Oseberg had some cultic role, as a cult leader,⁴² an incarnation of the goddess Freyja,⁴³ or a *völva* (sorceress) able to transgress gender norms in life and death.⁴⁴ Nothing of the kind has been suggested for Gokstad, despite the fact that the connection between political and religious power in Viking Age Scandinavia has been stressed by a series of scholars.⁴⁵ This demonstrates how portrayals of Viking Age men have been equally stereotyped. They have been coloured by ideas of gender formed in an academic environment affected by the contemporary separation of worldly and religious power.

All in all, it appears to have been the notion of gender, and not empirical data, which has been the governing principle behind the presentation of Oseberg as another story. That scholars have been massively influenced by their contemporary gender roles has been argued to be an important explanatory factor of the situation in the early twentieth century,⁴⁶ but the context is different at the end of the last century and early in the present one. We can unearth a conservatism by which several leading scholars have retained a faith in the view of Oseberg that was established early in the twentieth century. More generally, they preserved the masculine image of the Viking Age that was constructed in the nineteenth century.⁴⁷ Against this backdrop, I would note that

emphasizes an extra shoe-sole, three haircombs, a tent, and the frame of a structure in which the three deceased are suggested to have lain within before their burial in the ship.

41 Price 2015, 360.

42 Gjessing 1943; Røthe 1994.

43 Ingstad 1992.

44 Price 2002, 200–01; Solli 2002, 227–31.

45 e.g., Steinsland 1991; Hedeager 2011.

46 Arwill-Nordbladh 1998b.

47 For instance, a male-dominated Viking society is found in Skre 2007 and his other contributions to that volume, see Pedersen 2014. An androcentric worldview also typifies Price 2015, in

Gustafson and Brøgger followed a conservative line. Early in the twentieth century, the campaign for women's suffrage contributed to the discussion of the social role of women in both the present day and in the deep past,⁴⁸ as the debate at the women's meeting illustrates, but none of this can be found reflected in the scholarship of those archaeologists. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the divergent interpretations of Oseberg and Gokstad are rooted in academics' perception of gender, which from the start was influenced by the predominant gender roles of the time. Following on from that, the conventional narratives continued to be transmitted while the feminist critique was largely overlooked, and to some extent met with resistance. The established androcentric story assumed considerable power over us scholars — as I shall now demonstrate.

In a Masculine Story-Frame

In 1992, Anne Stine Ingstad wrote, 'Could this woman have been something more than a queen?'⁴⁹ Her objective in promoting the principal individual is clear, but the question reveals her view of the 'main person' in Oseberg as a queen consort and exposes a terminological problem. The term 'queen' encompasses very different roles, from passive consorts to powerful rulers over wide lands and many people, such as Queen Elizabeth I of England. Nevertheless, that latter sense has rarely been deemed relevant to Oseberg. Considering that Elizabeth II was a ruling queen in Ingstad's lifetime, and that Queen (and Empress) Victoria was reigning up until a few years before the Oseberg excavation, it is startling that so few archaeologists have discussed whether the role of a ruler may be pertinent.

Ingstad based her work on that of Guttorm Gjessing,⁵⁰ who paved the way for completely new understandings of the ship burial by emphasizing artefacts for cult purposes, such as the richly decorated cart and carved animal-head posts (Fig. 8.2). He argued that the Oseberg queen was a powerful individual, the leader of a cult of Freyr, a *hofgyðja*, albeit without discussing whether her power was linked to a political role. Allusions to fertility were stressed by Ingstad.⁵¹ She concluded that one of the women must have been Freyja's earthly representative and incarnation and therefore much more than just a

which men are consistently presented as more powerful and active than women. See also Moen 2019a; 2019b for a more general critique of Viking Age scholarship.

48 Hagemann 2005, 247–50; Larsen 2013.

49 Ingstad 1992, 230 (trans.).

50 Gjessing 1943.

51 Ingstad 1992, 252–53.



Figure 8.2. The so-called Academician's animal-head post decorated in animal style. Photo: E. I. Johnsen © Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo, CC BY-SA 4.0.

queen,⁵² yet this was asserted without assessing whether this ritual role had consequences in terms of political power. Once again, it is striking that no remark or reference was made to relevant scholarship, including the works of the historian of religion Gro Steinsland, who demonstrates how interwoven ritual and political roles were in Viking Age society.⁵³ Just such a linkage between religious and worldly roles was prominent in the Late Viking Age, as I have noted previously.⁵⁴ This is clear in a Christian context with strong Scandinavian ties, when Queen Ælfgifu (Emma) and King Cnut the Great are portrayed as a ruling couple who have obtained their worldly roles via God's angels in the contemporary Winchester New Minster *Liber vitae* manuscript. In their case, the power of rulership is quite explicitly expressed in the text alongside them: Cnut is *rex* and Ælfgifu the female counterpart *regina*. Steinsland has shown that the power of rulership was just as clearly expressed via objects as in previous centuries.

I have previously focused upon material expressions of sovereign power in the Oseberg burial and argued that a seat may be such a symbol.⁵⁵ The wooden chair, originally with brightly painted decoration and probably with textile at the front,⁵⁶ has clear points of comparison with the throne of Charlemagne,⁵⁷ and probably alluded to the concept of the high-seat, a sitting place of authority for people and gods in Viking Age Scandinavia.⁵⁸ A female figure sitting on a chair (albeit only 17.5 mm high),⁵⁹ appears indeed to underline the point that in the Viking Age there was a perception that linked women with this politically and religiously laden symbol.⁶⁰ Illustrative of the point being stressed here, is that ever since it was first published this silver figurine has been referred to as the Óðinn from Lejre. This is based on one detail interpreted as a moustache, the chair, and the two birds sitting on the arms, supposed to be Huginn and Muninn, Óðinn's ravens.⁶¹ This interpretation is therefore yet another example of some scholars' readiness to explain away manifest links between women and symbols of power.

The tapestries from Oseberg show, meanwhile, that birds are also associable with female figures, including one sitting woman who is driving a cart.⁶² That the detail under the nose of the Lejre figure is a moustache has also been refuted, and it is more plausibly interpreted as a ring, and thus yet another symbol of rulership.⁶³

Previously, I have also picked out a small piece of wood from Oseberg shaped like an arrow,⁶⁴ and suggested that it could be a war-arrow, to summon people.⁶⁵ I have pointed out that weapons are shown on the tapestries, carried both by men and women, and textile tools were used to create lasting pictures of the consequences of a battle.⁶⁶ Without recanting any of my earlier ideas, I can subsequently see that I was searching for signs of power in the military sphere, which in the case of the Viking Age is recognized as an arena mainly for men, although with women taking part. One may ask if I was trying to turn women into men.

Without downplaying the significance of the seat, the arrow, and the military scene, which still do say something about the roles of these women, I would note that with the benefit of hindsight it is easy to recognize that I was trying to find signs of power that were already recognized, amongst which weapons in particular root power in what is often regarded as the men's sphere. I clearly approached the task with pre-ingested assumptions about how power is manifested and was influenced by conventional perceptions of the Viking Age and what power could be. This led me to privilege a few items from a very complex grave assemblage and look straight past the most characteristic features of Oseberg. Have I, and many other scholars who have worked with the ship burial, overlooked what were equally obvious and forceful expressions of power? From the present viewpoint,⁶⁷ and starting with the characteristic features of the ship burial, I will, with the support of more recent research and Arwill-Nordbladh's previous reflections, discuss what more expressive features of the grave-goods may reveal about the persons interred and about power in the Viking Age.

The Search for Another Story

The ship, a remarkably well-preserved sailing vessel equipped with oars, is the artefact from Oseberg that has received the greatest attention. It immediately

52 Ingstad 1992, 255.

53 Steinsland 1990; 1991.

54 'New Minster *Liber vitae*'; Pedersen 2017, 101–03.

55 Pedersen 2008, 590; 2017, 114–16; see also Sigurdsson 2017, 113. It is too limited to regard it as a 'chest-seat' for the storage of household items, Christensen 2010b, 9, as it has relatively recently been called in an article which otherwise emphasizes chairs as ruler-seats, especially if they are associated with men.

56 Grieg 1928, 105–08, fig. 53.

57 As discussed in Pedersen 2017, 114–16.

58 Steinsland 1990, 84; 1991.

59 Christensen 2010b; 2010a; Mannering 2014.

60 This suggestion is supported by other miniature chairs known from women's graves: see Roesdahl 1977, 101, fig. 41.

61 Christensen 2010b.

62 See Ingstad 1992, 232, 35; Vedeler 2019, 42.

63 Mannering 2014, 83.

64 Grieg 1928, 271, fig. 166.

65 Pedersen 2017, 118.

66 Pedersen 2008, 591.

67 Haraway 1988.

creates associations with iconic activities, namely the Viking expeditions. But, despite the fact that the burial ritual took place in a period of regular Viking raids, it has, as far as I am aware, never been suggested that the deceased could have been a Viking queen(s) in the literal sense: who initiated and/or led a Viking foray. On the contrary: soon after it was excavated the Oseberg ship was written off by Gustafson as suitable for rather tame voyages, and was described as ‘a luxury yacht for peaceful journeys in calmer waters’,⁶⁸ and ‘reserved for a high-ranking lady’s private use on local voyages.’⁶⁹ The queen is explicitly identified as the owner of the ship by Haakon Shetelig,⁷⁰ but it was clearly dismissed as a Viking ship. Consequently, a discussion of the women’s role in Viking expeditions was excluded from the very start.⁷¹ It was first in Vibeke Bischoff’s PhD thesis of 2019 that it was determined that ‘the Oseberg Ship was originally technically advanced and seaworthy’, on the basis of experiments with model reconstructions and full-size ships.⁷² Her investigation was inspired by, amongst other things, dendrochronological analyses which demonstrated that the ship was built on the west coast of Norway, probably in what is now north Rogaland or south Hordaland.⁷³ The ship had therefore sailed some distance before it ended up in a burial mound in Vestfold, and had the rack on which shields could be fastened. It could, then, have crossed the sea, been equipped for military activity, and brought plunder back to Scandinavia. Is it inconceivable that at least one of the women was directly or indirectly involved in Viking raids?

When we look at the Oseberg grave, it is quite clear that the ship was equipped for travel, for example with camping gear and a possible tent.⁷⁴ Here again, association with the Viking expeditions is reasonable, although, as Arwill-Nordbladh has stressed, it is striking how the cooking equipment at Oseberg has been described as a ‘very small kitchen’ even if it could just as well be taken as gear for a journey.⁷⁵ On its last voyage, the ship was subject to the rules and norms of the impressive burial

ritual, nevertheless the ceremonies and artefacts may provide direct references to the women’s actual lives, including their long-distance voyages. Some objects can be directly linked to the raids or other journeys across the North Sea, including the so-called ‘Buddha pail’.⁷⁶ Such items, which are referred to as ‘Insular imports’, are often found in women’s graves of the Early Viking Age, although, as in the case of Oseberg, those deceased women have rarely been thought of as active participants in the Viking expeditions.⁷⁷ It has rather been taken for granted that the objects were gifts from returning Vikings — men, of course. Even this view has been challenged in recent years. Aina Heen-Pettersen and Griffin Murray have suggested that the woman buried with a complete reliquary shrine in an early ninth-century grave from Melhus, Trøndelag, Norway, must have been much more than just a recipient. They argue for the significance of ritual acts in the planning and execution of overseas expeditions, emphasizing the role of cult in Viking Age society. They suggest that both the shrine and a disc-on-bow brooch may have been items used in the exercise of ritual power.⁷⁸ Heen-Pettersen goes one step further and argues that women who were involved in overseas expeditions took their share of the booty.⁷⁹

At least one of the Oseberg women may then have been involved in Viking expeditions and journeys overseas. There has been a growing awareness that women were active agents in the Viking expansion, as well as in various other forms of mobility in other periods of prehistory.⁸⁰ Women’s graves elsewhere with Scandinavian dress-accessories,⁸¹ a growing number of such stray finds,⁸² and the warrior-woman from Birka previously mentioned, all point towards this being possible. Written sources such as *Landnámabók* show that women not only travelled, they also led a company of travellers intending to settle in a new land, as, for instance, the *landnám* matriarch Auð the Deep-Minded did.⁸³ Arwill-Nordbladh has drawn particular attention to her as a plausible illustrative archetype for the Oseberg find.⁸⁴ In the urban site of Kaupang, a woman actually sits at the helm in a complex boat grave.⁸⁵ Altogether,

68 Gustafson 1906, 133 (trans.), as discussed in Pedersen 2023.

69 Shetelig 1917, 341 (trans.). See also Brøgger and Shetelig 1950, 184. The geologist W. C. Brøgger has a similar discussion, as noted by Arwill-Nordbladh 1998b, 101–02, in which he also reflects upon how difficult journeys over land must have been for a woman.

70 Shetelig 1917, 341.

71 The strong association between ship and men is even found when Solli 2002, 229–30 argues that the ship, the horses, and some farming implements are indications of ‘maleness’ in Oseberg. However, none of these categories are exclusively found in burials with males.

72 Bischoff 2019, 264.

73 Bonde and Stylegar 2009.

74 Grieg 1928, 136–37, 250–63; Christensen and others 1992, 89.

75 Arwill-Nordbladh 1998b, 100.

76 Grieg 1928, 72–75. For other artefacts, see Shetelig 1920, figs 213–14; Grieg 1928, fig. 34.

77 Heen-Pettersen 2022.

78 Heen-Pettersen and Murray 2018, with support from research into dress-fasteners: Glørstad and Røstad 2015.

79 Heen-Pettersen 2022, 263.

80 e.g., Heen-Pettersen 2019; 2022; Furholt (this volume); Melheim (this volume); Skogstrand (this volume).

81 e.g., Norstein 2020.

82 Kershaw 2013.

83 Pálsson 1997, 19–20.

84 Arwill-Nordbladh 1998b, 146.

85 Stylegar 2007, 95; Moen and others 2023.

Oseberg suggests that the concept of 'sea-king' can be complemented with that of 'sea-queen'.⁸⁶

Recognition of the active role of the Melhus shrine enables us to consider the Buddha pail as something more than just one of many components of the exceptional burial tableau at Oseberg. Heen-Pettersen argued that Insular artefacts linked to the serving of food and drink were used by Scandinavians in the exercise of ritual power. The pail, therefore, may have been used during ritual activity preceding the interment, maybe even with references to its original, Christian, ritual function.⁸⁷

Whatever the case, this pail is part of a major assemblage of objects that were appropriate for the preparation and serving of food and drink. Quite typically, these items from the women's grave were originally published under the heading of 'The King's Court'. Most of them appear there under the heading of 'The Kitchen', while the Buddha pail and various other carefully manufactured items were discussed as 'Art and Craft'. I have previously pointed out that 'household' would be a more relevant label, an entity which was valued by intellectuals of the ninth century, including by Charles the Bald's counsellor Hincmar of Reims.⁸⁸ He emphasized that the administration of the royal household was critical to the strength of the kingdom.⁸⁹ In Oseberg we can glimpse a household of regal character via a wooden vat with a capacity of 500 L and a two-metre-long baking tray.⁹⁰ These were objects of great political significance in a society for which inviting guests was a crucial social institution, and where the ability to feed a large number of people and to hold large-scale feasts was an elite obligation.⁹¹ Heen-Pettersen has stressed that the expensive Viking expeditions must have intensified the practice of formal hospitality for the formation of alliances.⁹² Grethe Bukkemoen has demonstrated that it is precisely the items of daily life which can provide new insights into socio-political developments.⁹³ She shows how the preparation of food steadily increased in significance into the Viking Age, and that food became a resource for leadership from the Migration period onwards. For those who organized the burial at Oseberg, the kitchen had quite different connotations than it had for scholars of the twentieth century. By including household equipment, they probably intended to make concrete leadership capacities visible.

Oseberg's Splendour

In retrospect, it is easy to see how, in my search for signs of power, I completely overlooked the most particular feature of the grave assemblage, namely the extensive and rich decoration on the Oseberg ship (Fig. 8.1) and numerous other artefacts (Fig. 8.2). There are at least 12–15 m² of carved wood,⁹⁴ and this ostentatious feature has of course not passed unremarked. The decoration was stressed from the very first publications,⁹⁵ and Shetelig wrote 'decoration has been prodigiously spread over an extreme diversity of wooden objects' and 'everything which surrounded the person would be a work of art'.⁹⁶ Stylistic datings indicate that the objects in the animal style were accumulated over time,⁹⁷ and dendrochronological dates have confirmed that the ship in what Shetelig regarded as an older style, was constructed around the year 820 and the burial chamber in AD 834.⁹⁸ The woodcarving, however, just like the ship, was immediately excluded as a sign of power by Gustafson and Shetelig. Or, more precisely, the decoration was an argument for rejecting the Oseberg ship as being seaworthy.⁹⁹

As a side comment, I find it ironic that Gustafson's dismissal of the seaworthiness of the Oseberg ship on the basis of the carved wood occurs on the same page as an illustration of the Jelling stone, a richly decorated runestone on which King Harald Bluetooth declares that he conquered Denmark and Norway and made the Danes Christian. Gustafson clearly did not reflect upon the fact that decoration in animal style appears to have been crucial when a king manifested his power over people and lands.

The decoration in the Oseberg grave enjoyed a lot of attention, and volume III of the state-financed publication series *Osebergfundet* was reserved for the woodcarvings.¹⁰⁰ A concluding remark by Shetelig illustrates the gender perspective at the heart of his interpretations:

Even an archaeologist can take pleasure in the joy that she had by following such a rare talent as that of the Baroque Master, whose decorative genius found expression in work after work in her service. Her sober kinsman Olav at Geirstadir might perhaps smile, and Halvdan the Black gladly allowed his

86 Cf. Skre 2017.

87 Heen-Pettersen 2020.

88 Pedersen 2008, 119.

89 Stafford 1997, 97.

90 Grieg 1928, pls XI and XII.

91 Enright 1986; Herschend 1997, as Arwill-Nordbladh 1998b, 195 has pointed out, with specific reference to Oseberg.

92 Heen-Pettersen 2020.

93 Bukkemoen 2022; 2025.

94 Shetelig 1920, 1.

95 e.g., Gustafson 1906, 131.

96 Shetelig 1920, 1 (trans.).

97 Shetelig 1920.

98 Bonde and Christensen 1993.

99 Gustafson 1906, 133; Shetelig 1917, 341, see Pedersen 2023.

100 Shetelig 1920.

mother to have her way in this humour, which provided an outlet for much unused desire to work.¹⁰¹

The ability to gather male artists around her thus gave the woman he refers to as the ‘art-loving queen’ something to busy herself with. Once again there is a striking difference between how Oseberg and Gokstad are discussed. Olav at Geirstaðir is the king Shetelig believed to have been buried at Gokstad,¹⁰² and he states that ‘The art in the Gokstad ship is good enough, but not excessive; it declares neither a passion for art nor the pleasure of a collector.’¹⁰³ This conception of the woodcarving as functionless art held the stage for much of the twentieth century, and this underlying gender ideology manifestly governed scholars, myself included, into the present century. I am not alone in having neglected the decorated and beautiful objects in a discussion of the political role of the Oseberg woman or women. As far as I know, the rich artwork in the Oseberg find has not been highlighted by any others as a sign of power.¹⁰⁴ Quite the contrary: the decorative aspects of the Oseberg find have long helped to downplay the political significance and role of the deceased. Seen in the light of newer scholarship, this was an error.

The Force of Animal Art and the Power of Narratives

Shetelig drew particular attention to the point that the art had been used by an ambitious ruling family in order to cast an aura over its political position, but he did not discuss whether it might have helped to create a position of dominance.¹⁰⁵ The recognition of what the Scandinavian animal art represents has, in recent decades, given us an entirely new understanding of the decorated artefacts from the Viking Age and the preceding centuries. It may not be a coincidence that two women, Elna Siv Kristoffersen and Lotte Hedeager, have been in the vanguard in placing animal art in a new conceptual framework.¹⁰⁶ It is not passive art, as Shetelig assumed, but a forceful visual language, closely connected to the elite, actively used in order to legitimize political projects, and with a force in

itself, independent of human agency. Richly decorated objects were a precondition for the exercise of ritual and magic power.¹⁰⁷ Much simpler objects with comparable decoration, including the mundane artefacts in the Oseberg burial, show that the pictorial language was accepted and copied far beyond the elite. Against a backdrop of this kind, it is far from contradictory that the Oseberg ship was both seaworthy *and* lavishly decorated. The animal art of the earliest phase of the Viking expeditions may have been counted as a prerequisite for undertaking dangerous journeys across the sea, as demonstrated by Margrethe K. H. Havgar. She has revealed a clear interplay between the ship and its decoration, with different motifs on the inner and outer sides of the ship interpreted as a difference between the known, human sphere and the unknown seaway which the ship was to cross.¹⁰⁸

The reinterpretations of the animal art stimulate reflections over the influence the deceased had on its manufacture. It is no longer given that the art-loving queen merely admired the work of craftsmen, as Shetelig supposed. We cannot exclude the possibility that women themselves participated in carving these works. The large number of pieces of textile equipment do more than just indicate that those interred had themselves played an active part in the craftwork which resulted in tapestries, with scenes which nowadays we find easier to decipher than the intricate animal art. That textile-craft has often been presented as a domestic and private task of limited social significance reflects scholars’ androcentric assumptions rather than prehistoric reality, as indeed Mandt and Arwill-Nordbladh have shown in the case of Oseberg, and Steinunn Kristjánsdóttir shows in respect of medieval religious houses in Iceland.¹⁰⁹ The surviving fragments of tapestry from Oseberg make visible the importance of visual narratives, and that, ‘Past and present, magic and *real politics* are woven together to form potent tales’, in Marianne Vedeler’s words.¹¹⁰ The narratives may have been played out within rituals, or perhaps more likely have been formed through rituals, including the burial ceremony at Oseberg, as pointed out by Neil Price.¹¹¹ In this way it illustrates how meaningful it was that implements for textile-manufacture were kept under lock and key in boxes and chests,¹¹² rather than what we nowadays would readily recognize as great wealth. The

101 Shetelig 1920, 331 (trans.).

102 With reference to Brøgger 1916; Shetelig 1920, 2.

103 Shetelig 1920, 331 (trans.).

104 The writing of this chapter inspired me to delve into the power of beauty, see Pedersen 2023.

105 Shetelig 1920, 2.

106 Kristoffersen 1995; 2000a; 2000b; Hedeager 1997; 1999; 2003; 2004; with other key contributions from Domeij Lundborg 2006; Neiß 2022.

107 Hedeager 2015, 144.

108 Havgar 2019, 55–57; 2020.

109 Mandt 1992; Arwill-Nordbladh 1998b, 199–213; Kristjánsdóttir (this volume).

110 Vedeler 2019, 126.

111 Price 2010.

112 Berg 2021, 353–66.

textile equipment and the tapestries were tools for the appropriation and maintenance of wealth and power.

Towards New Seaways

To gather these threads: Oseberg is *not* another story. It is a material demonstration of power, like Gokstad and monumental ship burials in general. At the same time, the well-preserved women's grave can open our eyes to other stories. Those other stories are not free of violence and weapons, but they do illustrate that power is a matter of much more than the physical control of others.¹¹³ Oseberg underlines that the business of providing for others, and being able to obtain, produce, give away, and surround oneself with elaborate objects, was essential for the most powerful in Viking Age society. They acknowledged the power of beauty, as I have argued elsewhere.¹¹⁴

The physical remains of lived lives at Oseberg illustrate how the narratives that were written by ambitious Christian men in Iceland early in the medieval period, and by male scholars around the year 1900, deliver an incomplete picture of Viking Age society. Even object-oriented archaeologists for a long time allowed themselves to be governed by the gender perspectives of the medieval textual sources and of their own time, and it is all too obvious how quickly, after the excavation of 1904, the principal outlines of the story of Oseberg were established. The ship was not accepted as seaworthy, the decoration was used to corroborate this view, and the women were regarded as having had much less weight in the business of life than men interred in similar graves. As was already pointed out in the 1990s, even the woman assumed to have been the main person was discussed as an object, as someone's housewife or mother, in contrast to those supposedly politically powerful men buried in very much the same way.

In many ways, the discovery of the ship burial could have challenged the masculine interpretative framework of the Viking Age which had been constructed shortly before its excavation, but that did not happen. Rather, the Oseberg discovery and the two women have, for more than a century, been caught up within the already established narrative framework in which there was no

place for ruling queens. As a result, until very recently, it has been possible to maintain a narrative involving passive women, and on very slender grounds to speculate about whether this grave could have housed a man as well. The explicit and precise critiques of the feminists published in the 1990s and since have had astonishingly little impact, and on the whole, there can be no doubt that the research networks have hitherto been reticent in recognizing gender roles that differ from those which dominated the narrative framework established in the nineteenth century. It has also proved to be easy to return to a traditional conception of power even in attempts to argue for the role of the women in power politics.

The androcentric perspective in Oseberg scholarship of the first half of the twentieth century demonstrates how strongly influenced leading scholars were by the ruling gender ideology of their time. In the same way, this chapter embodies the fact that I am writing at a moment when an entire generation in the Nordic countries has grown up with gender equality action plans and a growing number of women in leading political positions. I hope that my discussion here will be challenged by works, like Solli's,¹¹⁵ which raise questions about the relevance of the conceptual dichotomy man/woman and other issues that I am not yet able to see. Around the turn of the millennium, it was, however, startling how great the strength of the established narratives of the Viking Age was, while new views on gender had little influence on the interpretations of Oseberg. The consequence is that research into the indicators of power and political leadership in Oseberg has barely started, even though they have been right in front of our eyes for so many years. By taking a starting point in the diverse materiality of this uniquely well-preserved ship burial, we can open the door to other histories, not only concerning Oseberg, but about the era we have learnt to know as the Viking Age.

Acknowledgements

An earlier version of this text was translated from Norwegian to English by John Hines. I am grateful to my co-editors, Lars Erik Gjerpe, Rebecca Bendiksen Johansen, Rebecca Cannell, and the reviewer for insightful comments on earlier versions of the manuscript.

¹¹³ Arent 2017, 60–79; Lund and others 2022; Pedersen 2023.

¹¹⁴ Pedersen 2023.

¹¹⁵ Solli 2002.

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9. A *Völva* or *Seiðmaðr* in Finland?

Cultural Creolization as a Problem for Interpretations

This chapter focuses on the elite boat burial from Pukkila in Isokyrö, Finland (AD 700), one of the last elaborate burials during the Merovingian period in southern Ostrobothnia. This is a Scandinavian-type burial which is situated in a cemetery context (cremation cemetery under level ground) that is often associated with Finnic language areas but in a region where the closest genetic matches are not too distant to the modern Sami. Based on diverse grave-goods we interpret the buried as a local middleman in the fur trade between Scandinavia and eastern cultures. A key concept is *cultural creolization*. Culture is here approached in terms of socially accessed signs with their conventions of use and combination. From this perspective, language is one type of sign system among others. Creolization developed in linguistics as a concept to account for the emergence of languages called ‘creoles.’¹ ‘Creole’ initially referred to a hybrid language (and also people) that emerged in the process of European expansion and in environments of colonialism. In more recent times, ‘creole’ as a linguistic phenomenon has been distinguished from specific historical political-economic circumstances in which emblematic examples arose. This concept has been extended from language to the full spectrum of cultural phenomena.² Creolization has sometimes been used as a vague synonym for hybridization, but is here described more specifically as the hybridization of a

sign system or systems that move between groups in an asymmetrical relationship resulting in a new, distinct, synthetic and socially shared sign system or systems.³ This case study illustrates the utility of the concept as a tool in research while simultaneously illustrating the problems of simple correlations of emblematic objects with ethnic or cultural identities.

Historical and Geopolitical Contexts

The northern border of the cultivated and permanently settled area of western Finland seems to have been in southern Ostrobothnia, which played an important part in long-distance trade networks already during the Early Iron Age, as seen in Roman imports that have probably entered the area via Scandinavian contacts.⁴ During the Migration period (AD 400–550) its networks widened to the north and the east, resulting in artefacts of Scandinavian, Baltic, and eastern and western European characteristics.⁵ The archaeological record suggests the sedentary communities relied mainly on agriculture and animal husbandry for their livelihoods, although fishing and hunting for furs must have played a vital role.

¹ Garrett 2021.

² e.g., Hylland Eriksen 1994; Chaunderson with Mufwene 2001; Bergstøl 2004; Haring 2004; Spangen 2005.

³ e.g., Chaunderson with Mufwene 2001; Haring 2004; Garrett 2021.

⁴ Holmblad 2013; Raninen and Wessman 2015.

⁵ e.g., Raninen and Wessman 2015.

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Figure 9.1. Map with the geographical position of Pukkila and other sites mentioned in the text. Map by the authors.

The Proto-Sami-speaking population in Finland has traditionally been both neglected and marginalized in the archaeological research. However, a distinctive development in the Ostrobothnian region is the emergence of water burials in both Levänluhta in Isokyrö and Kälämäki in Vörå. These sites seem situated peripheral to settlement areas and predominantly reserved for women and children, suggesting non-normative burial for only certain types of deceased members of the community.⁶ The emergence of water burial cemeteries in sufficiently close proximity to cremation cemeteries under level ground, which is the prevailing burial form during this time,⁷ might reflect neighbouring communities or even different burial practices within a single community. This would be consistent with similarity in material goods between these cemeteries.⁸ Isotopic analysis from Levänluhta indicates three subgroups with distinct dietary habits during AD 400–800, which could reflect different groups living in the area with distinct and versatile

livelihoods consisting of both marine, freshwater, and terrestrial diets.⁹ Preliminary genetic data from eleven Levänluhta individuals suggests a heterogeneous community consisting of individuals genetically closest to the modern Sami, with one individual resembling modern Scandinavians.¹⁰

During the eighth century, the settlement pattern becomes more scarce concentrating into smaller areas. Power seems to become concentrated or consolidated, as reflected by other Merovingian-period prestigious burials in the area (Fig. 9.1).¹¹ During the early ninth century, the evidence of settlement in Ostrobothnia seems to disappear almost completely,¹² although archaeobotanical analyses suggest that settlements were repeatedly moved due to the land upheaval process.¹³ Mobile societies were also presumably present in the region but there is little material evidence of this.

6 Wessman 2009; Wessman and others 2018, 448–49.

7 Wessman 2010.

8 Cf. Wessman and others 2018.

9 Oinonen and others 2020.

10 Sikora and others 2019.

11 Meinander 1950; Schauman-Lönnqvist 1996b, 133; Holmblad 2013.

12 e.g., Meinander 1950; 1977; Edgren 1993.

13 e.g., Baudou and others 1991; Engelmark and Viklund 2002.

Languages and Cultures

Knowledge of the language situation around the northern half of the Baltic Sea region during the Iron Age has transformed in recent decades. A brief outline is needed because the argument below concerns the cultures of this region, and language is often seen as iconic of culture.

So-called Late Proto-Finnic appears to have taken shape around AD 100¹⁴ in connection with a trans-Baltic trade network.¹⁵ Massive Germanic language influence¹⁶ with huge cultural impacts seems to have occurred in a smaller network and spread through related language areas.¹⁷ In today's Finland, Late Proto-Finnic was spoken especially in fixed-settlement areas in the south and gradually encroached inland, but these groups seem not to have pressed north until roughly the Viking Age,¹⁸ with Finnic place names only appearing in the Pukkila region in perhaps the ninth century.¹⁹

Following Luobbal Sámmol Sámmol Ánte (Ante Aikio), Proto-Sami emerges with a vowel shift in a relatively small speech community around AD 200 in a southern inland Finland and/or Karelia. By roughly AD 500, the language had spread through Finland, Karelia, and across the Scandinavian and Kola Peninsulas,²⁰ with other Uralic (i.e., related to Samic and Finnic) and Palaeo-European (i.e., non-Indo-European and non-Uralic) languages eventually disappearing through language shifts. Luobbal broadly distinguishes a Palaeo-Laplandic substrate in the north from Palaeo-Lakelandic in inland Finland.²¹ The paucity of Common Proto-Sami religious vocabulary suggests that many groups may have retained their culture when shifting their language.²²

In the area around Pukkila, some place names have Proto-Sami origins.²³ Names of some larger rivers and lakes are traced by Pauli Rahkonen to an independent Uralic language,²⁴ which he calls 'language X', but which we will here refer to as the Kyrö language. Proto-Sami names are common for places where mobile cultures were active, and where mobile groups' presence may have increased when the society or societies behind the cemeteries in this region seem to disappear during the Iron Age.

The Find Context

A cemetery called Pukkila II was found in the spring of 1920 when the foundation of a house was being built at the Pukkila homestead. When archaeologist Sakari Pälsi arrived, the building was already standing, and the rescue excavation was done under challenging conditions. The excavations were continued by Alfred Hackman that summer within the house's rooms, under and between the floor beams for only five days. A 70–80 cm thick profile needed to remain unexcavated along the inner walls of the rooms to protect the house's stone foundation. Thus, large parts of the cemetery remained unexcavated.²⁵

Some remarkable grave-goods dating to AD 650–700 were retrieved within a square metre area in the north-east room, which, according to Hackman, derive from a boat cremation burial. The burial was situated within a cremation cemetery under level ground, a type of collective cemetery in which the remains of each cremation were scattered across the cemetery, the dominant mortuary practice of fixed-settlement societies in Finland during the Late Iron Age, AD 550–1150.²⁶

Approximately seventy-five fragments of weapons, horse gear, and other objects were retrieved from a stony layer of black sooty soil together with an exceptionally low quantity of burned bones,²⁷ twenty to thirty boat rivets, and 1.4 kg of iron slag.²⁸ According to the landowner, almost 2 kg of rivets (probably around two to four hundred rivets, consistent with the number of rivets found in e.g., boat burials 6 and 7 in Valsgårde, Sweden)²⁹ were reported to have been found and thrown away by the construction workers, with some forty rivets saved for the archaeologists.³⁰ Hackman interpreted the large find assemblage as derived from a 'warrior burial inside a boat' of which the remaining rivets had been spread across the cemetery together with the slag after the funeral.³¹ There is no doubt that this was a boat burial.³²

The Grave: A Boat Cremation with Weapons and Animals

The varied grave-goods from Pukkila represent a diversity of cultural objects, although most attention has been

¹⁴ Schalin 2018.

¹⁵ Lang 2018.

¹⁶ Kallio 2015.

¹⁷ Lang 2018; Frog 2019a; (forthcoming).

¹⁸ Frog and Saarikivi 2015.

¹⁹ Rahkonen 2017, 298–302.

²⁰ Luobbal 2012, 79.

²¹ Luobbal 2012, 64, 80–88, 92.

²² Frog 2017b.

²³ Rahkonen 2017, 302–03; cf. Luobbal 2012, 77.

²⁴ Rahkonen 2017, 303–09.

²⁵ Hackman 1938, 1–10.

²⁶ See Wessman 2010, 21–27; on evidence of the cremation cemetery, see Hackman 1938, 17–22.

²⁷ One hundred grams according to Kivikero 2009.

²⁸ Hackman 1938, 10–15, 22.

²⁹ Edberg 2011, 12.

³⁰ Hackman 1938, 55.

³¹ Hackman 1938, 55, 58; see also Wessman 2010, 68; on the possibility that some planking may have been sewn, see Forssell 1985.

³² On boat burials in Finland, see Appelgren 1897; Wessman 2010.



Figure 9.2. Meat fork, rattle, staff, and a bird face ornament from the Pukkila boat burial. Photo: Matti Kilponen © Finnish Heritage Agency.

given to the parallels with the famous boat burials of Vendel, Ultuna, and Valsgärde in Uppland, Sweden.³³

Scandinavian Finds

The boat burial consisted of a large number of weapons, which is not uncommon in Finnish burials from this period. A long ring-sword (92 cm long with a blade length of 79 cm), dated to AD 700 based on its resemblance to a sword in the Vendel I burial, had been bent several times. The hilt was made of copper alloy and had elaborate Salin II style decorations and empty spaces, possibly for now-absent inlays. Bronze pieces from the scabbard were recovered, decorated in animal design.³⁴

Amongst the weapons was also a small copper-alloy bird face ornament with garnet eyes (see Fig. 9.2) that Hackman interprets as evidence of a helmet, potentially deriving from the nose-guard of a Vendel helmet.³⁵

Also found were striated bronze bands resembling those on helmets in Vendel I and XII and Valsgärde 5.³⁶ No helmets have been found in the Finnish area, so a helmet would be a very exceptional find. Thus we find it unlikely that these derive from a helmet. The bird face ornament might be a decoration from the sword scabbard.

Other high-status grave-goods include fragmented pieces of a probably complete set of horse gear: horse bits and more than ten bronze fittings from a bridle in Salin II style, with parallels in the Vendel burial VII. A large rattle-like object (see Fig. 9.2) (46.2 cm long), commonly interpreted as a whip handle, was also found.³⁷ The horse whip might also be a rattle (or rangle), part of a draught harness for wagons or sledges, seemingly frequent in Scandinavian boat burials.³⁸ A sledge is perhaps more probable here because of Pukkila's location next to a river that freezes.³⁹ The quantity of

33 See Hackman 1938, 56; Schauman-Lönnqvist 1999; Raninen and Wessman 2015, 267.

34 Hackman 1938, 60–65 and Tafel 8.

35 Burials I and XII Stolpe and Arne 1912.

36 Hackman 1938, 100–02.

37 Hackman 1938, 118, 132; see also Price 2002, 189; cf. Gardela 2016, 107–09.

38 Hedenstierna-Jonson and Ljungkvist 2021, 225, 230.

39 Sindbæk 2003, 182.

horse gear could suggest a horse was present, although the osteological analysis did not identify any horse bones, which is not uncommon in Finland.⁴⁰

A meat fork (see Fig. 9.2) and cauldron appear to be indicators of the deceased's high status, analogous to their presence in a Scandinavian burial. The meat fork with three curvilinear claws is a unique find in Finland, although such are found for example in Vendel, Ultuna, and Birka.⁴¹ The large iron cauldron, made of riveted pieces of iron plate, had been placed inverted on top of the cremation pit, thus in a sense covering the entire burial and the grave-goods. The cauldron's original size was estimated to be approximately 20 cm deep and 32.4 cm in diameter at the mouth,⁴² with equivalents in the Vendel graves IX, X, and XI and in Valsgärde grave 8.⁴³

Arguably the most intriguing feature of the burial is a badly damaged iron staff (see Fig. 9.2). As was common for the time,⁴⁴ Hackman interpreted this as a meat skewer, an interpretation now rejected by Scandinavian archaeologists.⁴⁵ This broken quadrangular iron rod measures 36.5 cm (i.e., it was probably originally much longer) with a basket-like feature at its end.⁴⁶ It belongs to Bøgh-Andersen's type III^m⁴⁷ or to Gardela's EHC type,⁴⁸ i.e., staffs with an expanded handle construction. This is the only staff found in Finland. It was immediately viewed as a Scandinavian import with parallels from Vendel XI and elsewhere.⁴⁹ Scandinavian staffs are often identified with Old Norse sorcery,⁵⁰ although Leszek Gardela argues for a more nuanced view, linking them to a broad range of concepts and multifunctionality.⁵¹ In the Pukkila burial, the staff can be considered an object related to the deceased's social position and identity, situated in an assemblage that includes several high-status objects and numerous items that point to a masculine warrior identity.

Focusing on high-status Scandinavian-type artefacts might at first glance make this seem like a Scandinavian boat burial abroad, yet distinctively Scandinavian goods are concentrated in the ring-sword, potential helmet, fork, cauldron, and staff,⁵² while other distinctively

Scandinavian finds such as precious metals, imported glass drinking vessels, or gaming pieces are lacking.

Non-Scandinavian Finds

The non-Scandinavian objects found in the Pukkila burial are often excluded from interpretations when discussing the burial, such as a large (46.5 cm) straight-backed seax (Fi. *väkipuukko*), typical for Merovingian-period Finland, among the weapons.⁵³ The blade is decorated with Scandinavian Salin style II animal motifs, which is quite unique within the Finnish finds.⁵⁴

Five arrowheads, representing four different types: an even-headed, a forked head (13.5 cm), two rhomboids, and a single barbed arrow can be associated with hunting large terrestrial animals or wild-fowling.⁵⁵ The even-headed and forked arrowheads are both of an early date, and become more common during the Viking Age and even later.⁵⁶ These arrowheads indicate that the forested area was being exploited for pelts and furs by local communities living or moving about in it.⁵⁷

Of the three belt buckles found in the burial one is of eastern origin, probably deriving from the Avarian areas of Hungary or Ukraine.⁵⁸ A thin bronze sheet belonging to a belt mount with a zigzag pattern is, according to Hackman, of eastern or central Russian origin.⁵⁹

The iron ring-headed dress pin, formerly believed to be of Estonian origin,⁶⁰ but later considered common in Finnish areas,⁶¹ has elaborate bronze pendants added to it. Although badly broken, it is evident that the dress pin has parallels to another high-status male burial from Pappilanmäki in Eura, south-west Finland;⁶² a burial that consisted of almost the same combination of dress pin, ring-sword, scramasax, and Permian belt decorations. Although Permian objects are missing from Pukkila, there are several nearby locations where these are found, such as in Isokyrö (Napue) and Vähäkyrö (the Kaavontönkkä boat burial).

The grave-goods included finds that are more difficult to link to an ethnic group, although Hackman considered these domestic.⁶³ For example, he mentions the convex-topped shield-boss with pieces of an iron handle as a common shield type on the western Finnish

40 Wessman 2010, 56.

41 Hackman 1938, 153–54.

42 Hackman 1938, 150–52.

43 Söyrinki-Harmo 1996, 66.

44 Price 2002, 181–200; 2019, 136–68; Gardela 2016, 91–93.

45 Price 2002; 2019; Gustin 2004; Gardela 2016.

46 Hackman 1938, 154.

47 Bøgh-Andersen 1999, 114.

48 Gardela 2016, 219.

49 Hackman 1938, 154–55; see also Price 2002, 192, 195.

50 e.g., Price 2002, 189–91.

51 Gardela 2016, 94, 116, 208.

52 Hackman 1938, 181.

53 Salmo 1938, 341.

54 Hackman 1938, 70–71; Salmo 1938, 136.

55 Hackman 1938, 78–91.

56 Hackman 1938, 79–83; Kristiansen 2020; Wessman and Oksanen 2022.

57 Hakamäki 2018; see also Hennius 2021.

58 Hackman 1938, 146, 184.

59 Hackman 1938, 147.

60 Hackman 1938, 105.

61 Mägi 1997.

62 Salmo 1941.

63 Hackman 1938, 178.

coast.⁶⁴ The only spearhead from the burial was a long (36.5 cm) socketed spearhead with no known parallels.⁶⁵

Who Was Buried Here?

Pukkila is a cremation cemetery under level ground. In this tradition, the funeral pyre was not placed on top of the cemetery but was erected elsewhere. The ashes were selected and transported from the pyre to the cemetery and scattered, which explains the low amount of burned bones (100 g). The boat cremation is situated as an individual burial in this type of collective cemetery. In most cases, such individual burials are elite burials dated to the Merovingian period.⁶⁶ The Pukkila boat cremation can be assumed to have been organized outside of the cemetery and the low preservation of the bones would thus suggest that either the remains of bones were simply not collected from the pyre, or these were scattered throughout the cemetery as Hackman proposed for the boat's rivets.⁶⁷

The poor preservation of the bone material did not allow sex assessment, but the analysis revealed that Pukkila II contained bones from two individuals, one adult (eighteen to forty-four years) and one juvenile or youth (ten to twenty-four years). There were also animal bones in the burial; parts of a dog's skeleton and bones from the lower limbs of a sheep/goat.⁶⁸

The staff is predominantly found in female graves, while the helmet and ring-sword are closely connected to male burials. Recent research has been reassessing the sexing of graves based on grave-goods.⁶⁹ The combination of a staff and weaponry is generally rare, which is unsurprising in the light of Scandinavian ideas about bodies. The type of specialist linked to staffs (*vplva*, from *vplr* 'staff') seems to have been characterized by a supernaturally open body, while the ideal warrior should have a closed body⁷⁰ — these may have been considered incompatible within a single person.

Combinations of swords with finds otherwise pointing to a woman's grave⁷¹ has produced a view that martial symbols of power were also identified with women in Iron Age Finland. This view is based on only two cases. In one, the swords are from the cremation cemetery in which the woman was inhumed, and she

was not buried with goods.⁷² In the other, the deceased was an XXY male with Klinefelter syndrome, whose gender-bending was at a biological level.⁷³ Sexing individuals based on grave-goods remains problematic, but a ring-sword and helmet nevertheless seem to index a male identity in the Pukkila grave, an interpretation that also appears consistent with the riding gear and almost all other objects. Although the particular significance of ring-swords in the Baltic Sea region remains unclear, it appears to be an emblem of status and power adopted in networks linked to Scandinavia. The male attributed with the sword is likely either the central person of the burial or the two people were of commensurate status.

The staff is more challenging to interpret. The staff might have been an attribute of a high-status woman as the second person in the grave, yet the lack of other artefacts emblematic of an important woman, such as brooches, does not support this interpretation. The ritual instrument may instead have been an attribute of the presumably male individual with the ring-sword as an emblem of supernatural power complementary to social, economic, and political power. While the ring-sword might be a juvenile's emblem of an inherited aristocratic role, a ritual specialist identity is linked to ideologies of supernatural power and agency. Comparative evidence from the Baltic Sea region suggests that a ritual specialist role would require a biological and social level of maturity that would presumably exclude the lower age range of the ten to twenty-four-year-old individual. The younger individual could still be the primary deceased in the grave, but the context of the grave must also be considered. A cremation boat burial has been transposed into a cremation cemetery under level ground, where it appears exceptional, marked by 'otherness' linked to transcultural networks and their models of prestige. The grave-goods would indicate a high-status individual even in a Scandinavian context and the 'otherness' of the burial (and presumably funeral) type would be augmented by the material investment in the Kyrö context, orchestrated by those who survived the deceased. These factors point to consolidated power and authority linked with a high status within these transcultural networks. The consolidation of such authority and its recognition in this way suggests that the primary deceased was recognized as an adult and had been for some time. This would require being in the older age range if it was the younger individual. Insofar as this position and characterization through a transcultural identity is likely to be an outcome of build-up over time, the balance of probability shifts to the older individual as the main deceased.

64 Hackman 1938, 93; Schauman-Lönnqvist 1996a, 59.

65 Hackman 1938, 76; Salmo 1938, 235–37.

66 Wessman 2010.

67 Hackman 1938, 58.

68 Kivikero 2009, 2–3.

69 Gardela 2016; Hedenstierna-Jonson and others 2017; Price and others 2019.

70 Frog 2019b.

71 e.g., Lehtosalo-Hilander 1984, 292.

72 Moilanen 2021, 77.

73 Moilanen and others 2022.

Scandinavian and eastern artefacts found in the Pukkila boat burial as well as in a boat burial not far away in Kaavontönnkä in Vähäkyrö must be viewed against the broader evidence of contacts both east and west. If we look at present-day Finland (including the Åland Islands) and its archaeological record on a larger scale, there is an increase in high-rank weapon graves, including with ring-swords, from the sixth to the ninth centuries. This evidence indicates strong contacts between western Finland and the kingdoms in the Mälars area and Gotland.⁷⁴ The geopolitical landscape of Scandinavia transformed in the middle of the sixth century, with significant movements of populations east of the Baltic and societal changes, still in many respects obscure, that resulted in groups in Finland developing roles in far-reaching trade networks to the east.⁷⁵ In the seventh and eighth centuries the communication routes between central Sweden and Ostrobothnia and Satakunta seem to have been especially strong.⁷⁶ These roles, presumably connected to the lively fur trade, are still observable in the eighth century.⁷⁷

This suggests that there existed groups in western Finland with the potential to deliver significant quantities of high-quality furs to Scandinavia, who also came to access prestigious goods, probably linked to the fur trade.⁷⁸ At least some people from Finland seem likely to have acted as middlemen between the fur hunters and the Svear, making them attractive partners.⁷⁹ Especially in the networks to the east, the northern Proto-Finnic dialect seems to have become important as a contact language,⁸⁰ which could explain the wealth in some burials in western Finland.⁸¹ Contacts in these networks were not limited to material exchange as reflected in the spread of ritual and religious vocabulary to the distant east.⁸²

The society that produced the Pukkila boat burial evolved within these long-distance networks. Even if the internal organization of the particular society is uncertain, its development seems linked to the consolidation or centralization of power in the region, enabling burials suggestive of elites in a stratified society.⁸³

Pukkila in Perspective — The Klinta and Vivalen Burials

As noted, the Pukkila grave has been compared to those of famous boat burial cemeteries like Valsgärde and Vendel, both located in the province of Uppland in Sweden. The similarities relate to the burial custom in general, but perhaps even more to the contents of the grave. Considering analogues for the Pukkila grave requires defining what elements are relevant for comparison and why. The remains of the Pukkila burial indicate complexity and diversity in the models and practices that gave rise to it.⁸⁴ In order to develop a nuanced understanding of what lies behind it, the different constitutive elements must be identified, contextualized, and interpreted, both in terms of single actions or manipulated symbols and as parts of a constitutive whole.

The boat burial custom in eastern central Sweden occurs during the Merovingian and Viking periods and is mainly concentrated in the provinces of Uppland and Västmanland. The cemeteries of Valsgärde and Vendel comprise both inhumations and cremation burials, but the famous boat burials are inhumations, and all contain men.⁸⁵ The burial custom was not exclusively male: there are other cemeteries with both men and women, like Tuna in Alsike and Gamla Uppsala, and yet others with only women, like Tuna in Badelunda. The graves are generally richly furnished with animals (horses, dogs, birds, etc.), weaponry, jewellery, household equipment, etc.⁸⁶ Meat forks and cauldrons are a recurring feature of these boat graves, but none of them include a staff. There are obvious differences in burial practice between the inhumation boat burials and the cremated Pukkila grave, at least at first glance. But the graves during this time period, and especially those considered to be elite burials, are all more or less unique in their composition and presentation. Each grave has its own expression and narrative.⁸⁷ Two graves from what is now Sweden are presented and discussed below for comparison with the Pukkila grave.

Burial Practice and Presentation — The Example of the Klinta Grave

The so-called Klinta grave, numbered grave 9 (RAÄ 59:3, SHM 25840), was one of a small number of

74 Schauman-Lönnqvist 1996b, 135; 1999; Callmer 2017, 137.

75 Tvauri 2014, esp. 45–47.

76 Callmer 2017, 137.

77 Roslund 2017, 170; cf. also loanwords suggesting long-distance trade, Saarikivi 2018; on the Glazov silver neck rings, of which three of five in Finland derive from southern Ostrobothnia, see Holmblad 2013, 196; Hårdh 2016, 16, 55, 62; Callmer 2017, 159–60.

78 Cf. Hennius 2021.

79 e.g., Gustin and Wessman 2020.

80 Frog and Saarikivi 2015, 91.

81 Carpelan 2006; Gustin 2016; Gustin and Wessman 2020.

82 Callmer 1994; Ahola and others 2014; Frog 2017a, 93–99.

83 Wickholm and Raninen 2006; Kuusela 2009.

84 Wessman 2010; Wessman and Williams 2017.

85 Stolpe and Arne 1912; Arwidsson 1980; Gräslund and Ljungkvist 2011.

86 See Hedenstierna-Jonson and Ljungkvist 2021.

87 Price 2008; 2020, 229.

cremation burials found during ground construction work in 1957.⁸⁸ The burials were all part of an extensive mound cemetery originating in the Late Iron Age and following the ancient central road through the village of Köpingsvik, on the west coast of the island of Öland. The grave has become famous for its interesting contents, among the best known of which are a staff, crowned by a three-dimensional model of a hall building, a bronze ewer from Turkestan, and two metal amulets with runic inscriptions. The grave consisted of a major cremation layer covered with limestone slabs and with a mound superstructure. The cremation layer held close to 15 L of burnt bones, mainly from different animals, an equal armed brooch, glass beads, harness bow mount, a smoothing stone, silver dirhams, various mounts, rivets, and nails. Dug through the cremation layer there was a pit containing a ceramic vessel with the burnt bones of a woman, approximately 2 L. The grave pit also contained an extensive number of objects, the above-mentioned staff, ewer, and amulets, together with one complete and one fragmented oval brooch, 151 beads of glass, carnelian, and rock crystal, a pendant, a bowl, a pair of scissors, knives, a key, and an axe. In the bottom of the pit were the remains of an uncremated hen-bird and, on top of the vessel, an iron amulet ring with Thor's hammers (often considered to be a regional variation of the predominant cremation burial custom linked to the Lake Mälaren Valley).⁸⁹

The adjacent grave, numbered 8, contained the remains of a man with a sword, bone gaming pieces, a scale, and bear, horse, and dog bones — and the oval brooch fragments missing from the female grave. A closer examination of the cremation layer in grave 9 showed more connections, based on which the excavator K. G. Petersson suggested the following sequence of events. The man and woman were placed in a boat and cremated at the site of grave 9. After burning the pyre, the remains of the boat (indicated by the rivets, mounts, and nails) were left on the site together with some of the objects and animals while the cremated bones from the female were collected, put into a vessel, and placed in a pit dug through the cremation layer. The remains of the man were collected and placed together with 'his' objects, in a separate spot subsequently covered with a mound. The two graves are an interesting example of the great complexity linked to burials. There were several different stages in the funerary process, and the bodies were initially treated as one unit, only to be separated at a later stage.⁹⁰ The grave included both traditional elements such as cremation, mound

superstructure, and a Thor's hammer amulet ring, but the funerary ritual was performed and burial presented in a unique manner.

Comparing the Pukkila and Klinta graves, archaeologically male and female objects were present in both cases at the time of the cremation. In the Klinta case, the post-cremation division of two individuals suggests how their identities were understood, whereas we can only interpret the material artefacts in the Pukkila case. Nevertheless, both burials display a movement between an individual and a shared or collective identity. In Klinta, a common identity was emphasized in the cremation, followed by burial as two separate individuals. In Pukkila, collective identity is emphasized by the character of the burial ground and possible spreading of boat remains, while the grave itself emphasizes the individuality of the buried.

The Narrative of the Grave — The Example of Vivalen, Grave 9

Objects appearing in new contexts and in unfamiliar combinations are not unique, but, when they do appear, they tend to create a new framework in which the grave is interpreted. The combination changes how we read the narrative of the grave. The cemetery of Vivalen, Härjedalen located on the verge of the fells, was discovered in 1909 by a local farmer, and excavations took place in 1913.⁹¹ The Vivalen grave is later than those at Pukkila and Klinta, with artefacts that point towards the late eleventh century, but these artefacts cross cultures and are brought together in a meaningful way contextually connected to the deceased's identity.

In this cemetery, the bodies were placed in rectangularly shaped pits, but with the bodies tightly wrapped in birch bark rather than placing them in coffins, a practice of local mobile groups⁹² conventionally labelled as Sami, although this is problematic.⁹³ A contemporary settlement of such groups with two huts was in the vicinity, and bones from reindeer, goat, or sheep and cattle. The burial site, including twenty-one identified graves, is considered Sami and dated to the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Many of the graves included objects deriving from various regions in the Baltic Sea area. They were mainly related to apparel and their placement suggests they had been worn.

Interred in Vivalen grave 9 was a man in his fifties,⁹⁴ also wrapped in birch bark bound between two planks.

88 Petersson 1958; 1964.

89 Ambrosiani 1964; Hedenstierna-Jonson 2015.

90 Cf. Hedenstierna-Jonson 2015.

91 Hallström 1944.

92 Zachrisson 1997, 56–60.

93 Luobbal 2012, 66.

94 Iregren and Alexandersen 1997, 82.

Preservation conditions were relatively good and his skeleton was one of the best preserved in the cemetery. The skeleton is biologically male, but the objects in the grave are archaeologically gendered both male and female. Traces of textiles show that the deceased had been wearing garments of wool and linen. The tablet-woven linen bands and silver-thread were consistent with the prevailing 'international' fashion. Hallström's careful observations indicate that thirty-eight glass and rock-crystal beads were worn as a necklace and a silver brooch held the fabric of a garment together under the chin.⁹⁵ The brooch was most likely produced in Denmark or Norway where it was a female dress-accessory.⁹⁶ Around his waist were the remains of a belt of regional Baltic fashion, decorated with numerous bronze fittings.⁹⁷ There were no proper weapons in grave 9, but an iron knife and a bronze needle case with a number of iron needles were suspended from the belt.⁹⁸ Needle cases have otherwise only been retrieved from female burials,⁹⁹ while belts of this type, with one exception, occur in burials that have been archaeologically assessed to be male.¹⁰⁰

The burial is of a biologically male individual in a Sami cemetery and grave interred wearing objects originating from various regions around the Baltic Sea, several of which would elsewhere be considered female. The foreign objects, free from connotations, could have been used in new and different ways, as their meaning and affiliations were still being constructed in this new setting. Alternatively, their connotations may have been known and used to emphasize the role of the interred and the narrative of the grave. In this case, the grave contained an individual who negotiated different genders and cultural affiliations.

Cultural Creolization

Cultural creolization is here approached as the hybridization of a sign system or systems rather than of individual signs as these are adapted between groups in an asymmetrical relationship and when they produce a new, distinct, synthetic, and socially shared sign system or systems in the new milieu.¹⁰¹ Asymmetrical relationships in cultural contact situations are often discussed

in terms of 'power',¹⁰² but they may also be viewed in terms of social, political, and/or economic capital, and relative authority. The dynamics of asymmetry are often complex, and they are usually unclear for Iron Age cultures, where an asymmetrical relationship is visible, but not whether it involved political subordination or 'taxation' visible in medieval records.

Signs can move between cultures without hybridization even though their meanings and associations may be different in the new environment. Cultural signs are not exclusive to members of a particular culture; they can also be recognized by outsiders, who may view them neutrally, as shared, or as linked to another cultural identity. Individual signs and whole collections of signs thus become meaningful in the second culture. The forked-head arrowheads in the Pukkila burial are characteristic of mobile cultures of the north, although they are found in contexts related to Finland's agrarian settlements from the Viking Age onwards.¹⁰³ Their archaeological distribution allows us to infer that they were likely perceived, from the perspective of people organizing the burial, as arrowheads of a mobile culture or mobile cultures generally. Entering the semiotic systems of a second culture, the sign's meaning may be more or less the same but with different connotations, such as being emblematic of an 'other'.

Like individual signs, whole systems of signs can be engaged across cultures without creolization necessarily taking place. Vivalen grave 9 presents a whole complex of signs reflecting the identity of a Norse woman. The situation of proximity to Norse settlements makes it reasonable to assume that the identification as Norse (i.e., 'other') women's dress was transparent.¹⁰⁴ There are no indications that the complex or its parts were being assimilated for local dress and the case remains unique. The meaningfulness of the complex arrangement of elements is most likely through direct reference to their use in Norse culture for expressing a woman's identity, and should be interpreted against that background.¹⁰⁵ The use is more complex than the culturally 'other' arrowheads in the Pukkila grave, yet it still seems to be based on a transposition of signs marked by cultural otherness. There was not a hybridization to produce a new system distinct from the model nor is there reason to think that borrowing is related to an asymmetrical relationship with the source culture.

For comparison with the Pukkila burial, a relevant example of cultural creolization is that of traditions linked to the Finno-Karelian ritual specialist known as a *tietäjä*.

95 Hallström 1944, 328.

96 Zachrisson 1997, 61.

97 Cf. Gollwitzer 1997, 71–76; Hedenstierna-Jonson and Holmquist Olausson 2006, 30–32.

98 Hallström 1944, 333.

99 Hedenstierna-Jonson and Kjellström 2014, 192.

100 Hedenstierna-Jonson 2015.

101 See e.g., Chauderson with Mufwene 2001; Haring 2004; Mufwene 2007.

102 e.g., Pratt 1991, 34.

103 Kivikoski 1973, 116.

104 Price 2002, 278.

105 Price 2019, 222–25, 228.

As discussed in detail elsewhere, the *tietäjä* institution formed through the assimilation of a north Germanic language-based ritual technology during the Iron Age, competing with and displacing the existing type of religious specialist and comprehensively restructuring both cosmological mythology and understandings of the body and how it was affected by things in the world.¹⁰⁶ The process entailed extensive hybridization, interpreting the Germanic models through vernacular ritual, mythology, and the Finnic poetic form. This change belongs to a directional flow from Germanic to Finnic also seen in language and material culture pointing to a valorization of north Germanic culture by Proto-Finnic speakers, elevating it in a way that created an asymmetrical relation. This created conditions for a ritual technology to become desirable as something 'they' have and 'we' do not, leading to its assimilation, resulting in assimilating a foreign religion by which the inherited religion was ultimately displaced. However, rather than simply transplanting one religion into another culture, hybridization occurred at the level of the full religious system, producing a new and enduring religious form through cultural creolization.

A Local Specialist?

A grave is more than the sum of its elements: context is crucial for interpretation. The Pukkila grave is a cremation burial that emphasizes the identity of the primary deceased or of both individuals with high-status goods, while the boat burial as well as central high-status goods are of Scandinavian character. The cremation appears within the context of a cremation cemetery under level ground. This cemetery type is bound to distinctive funerary practices characteristic of societies in south-west Finland¹⁰⁷ that are generally identified as Finnic-speaking.¹⁰⁸ Identifying the culture as Finnic-speaking based on the archaeological evidence is methodologically problematic,¹⁰⁹ and inconsistent with toponymic data.¹¹⁰ The spread of north Finnic funerary practices to the region seems not to have involved the establishment of a society in which Finnic was the language of in-group communication. The society's primary language of in-group communication was likely the Kyrö language or an extinct dialect of Proto-Sami, or it may have begun as one and shifted to the other. The situation is thus more complex than a north Finnic

culture's cemetery into which a Scandinavian burial has been juxtaposed or perhaps a Finnic creolization of Scandinavian religion (a *tietäjä*'s grave).

Burial practices are linked to institutionalized transitions of power, authority, and social identity on the one hand and relations to supernatural agents and forces on the other. Consequently, significant changes in burial practices are more likely than most other practices to reflect significant changes in institutions, ideologies, and even structures in society.¹¹¹ The spread of cremation cemeteries under level ground seems to occur around AD 550, centred in south-west and west Finland, but spreading to some areas in northern and eastern Estonia.¹¹² These changes follow the AD 536–537 climate event within the context of a number of changes in cultural geography in the Baltic Sea region during the second half of the sixth century.¹¹³ The origin of the burial practice is unclear, but its spread coincides with the change in roles of south-west Finland's societies in long-distance trade. Its appearance in both Estonia and Ostrobothnia suggests that impacts connected to funerary practices and associated beliefs spread through networks connected by seafaring and trade. Although individuals were no doubt instrumental in this process, the changes were clearly social and appear linked to particular networks rather than as some sort of missionary religion.

The appearance of boat burials in Finland is very likely connected to ideas about the otherworld and what happens after death. The boat burial in Kaavontönnkä shows that the Pukkila boat burial is not an isolated incident, pointing to a broader social change. In the Valsgårde cemetery, the fifteen boat graves, representing the local elite, are chronologically separated from each other, with only one or a few individuals buried per generation.¹¹⁴ That so few graves have been found in Ostrobothnia may thus be attributable to the combined factors that the type of burial was generally infrequent, and the practice was being assimilated only shortly before the society disappeared.

Boat burials are not unusual for mainland Finland, but they are often scattered into the cremation cemeteries without any links to the individuals. The limited number of boat burials in Ostrobothnia in combination with the grave finds suggests that the Pukkila grave is modelled on practices directly from Scandinavia, which can be viewed in the context of other examples of individual graves in different cremation cemeteries under level ground, some interpreted as elite warriors and others

106 Frog 2013.

107 Wessman 2010.

108 Frog and Saarikivi 2015.

109 Saarikivi and Lavento 2012.

110 Rahkonen 2017, 298–302.

111 See also Kristiansen and others 2017, 336; Frog 2017b, 44.

112 Wessman 2010, 98; Tvauri 2012, 259–61.

113 Frog and Saarikivi 2015.

114 Hedenstierna-Jonson and Ljungkvist 2021, 241.

as early Christian burials.¹¹⁵ Juxtapositions of burial practices with continuity of place are not unusual during transitions of religion or ideology impacting burial practices, and the large number of rivets spread throughout the cemetery led Hackman to interpret the Pukkila burial as a boat cremation from which rivets were also distributed throughout the cemetery.¹¹⁶ If his interpretation is correct, the ritual made the identity or agency of the primary deceased a distinct focal point while the distribution of remains throughout the cemetery space linked the event to local practices conventional to the cemetery type. Such bridging between burial practices would suggest that the primary deceased was viewed as part of the local community by those performing the funerary rituals.

The prestige goods in southern Ostrobothnian cemeteries, such as Vestland-type cauldrons,¹¹⁷ suggest that the local polity or prominent people in it were active in trade networks. The unusual and impressive spectacle of the funeral and its contrast with local practices likely made the Scandinavian features of the burial more pronounced, emphasizing the high-status goods as indicators of social elite.

The ring-sword and artefacts linked to a masculine warrior identity are combined with a staff that in a Scandinavian context would index a feminine identity. The staff was likely considered an emblem of authority and supernatural agency. The staff could simply be a ritual object of foreign origin used locally, perhaps conceived as exceptionally empowered owing to its otherness, but the number of other rare high-status objects point to the penetration of Scandinavian practices into the local society.

The Pukkila grave points to religious creolization on multiple levels, beginning from the assimilation of north Finnic cremation cemeteries under level ground to the transposition of elite boat burials into that cemetery context. The society comes into focus as a polity that was oriented around engagements with other polities more central in trans-Baltic trade networks. The society actively assimilated ritual practices connected with religion and worldview on the platform of an unknown vernacular religion, producing something that was no doubt unique. The asymmetrical relation of this society to

those from which it drew, augmented by its geographical remoteness on the periphery, suggest that these processes had very limited if any reciprocal impact. Other finds in the grave point to ties with mobile groups, but the society's active assimilation of Finnic and Scandinavian cultures implies that, like those cultures, it was inclined to contrast itself with the mobile cultures in a marked asymmetry. The presence of the staff in the burial emerges as another manifestation of identity-building through adapting models of more prominent cultures in the network. Rather than 'translating' a foreign type of specialist through local culture, as with the Finno-Karelian *tietäjä* institution, the specialist in the Pukkila grave more likely reflects the augmentation of the role and technologies of a local specialist role with Scandinavian models. As with the Vivalden grave, the single example leaves it unclear whether this was the unique adaptation of an individual or reflects the emergence of new and distinct social practices. In either case, it belongs to the pattern of religious creolization that characterized the local society.

Conclusion

Cultural creolization offers a valuable tool for exploring evidence of cultural contacts and interaction in the archaeological record. It augments current interest in forms of cultural mixing and hybridization. The definition of creolization demands considering not only transpositions across cultures but their complexity and social establishment of something new and distinct from what has been combined. Raising the question of creolization demands an assessment of whether the phenomenon is social or a case is potentially isolated and not only how it is the same as something else but also how it is different. More significantly, it adds a social dimension by bringing into focus the question of whether relations between societies are symmetrical or asymmetrical, even if the precise nature of asymmetries cannot be pinned down. Whether or not specific cases constitute creolization is of course interesting, but the true value of the concept is in the questions with which it compels us to interrogate those cases.

¹¹⁵ e.g., Wickholm and Raninen 2006; Wessman 2010.

¹¹⁶ Hackman 1938, 4, 54–56.

¹¹⁷ Wessman 2009, 86–87; Wessman and others 2018, 447.

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10. Gender and Relationality in the Viking Age

Mortuary Archaeology beyond Grave-Goods

‘Sexing metal’¹ — the tradition within Viking Age archaeology of interpreting the sex and gender identity of past individuals based on the artefacts that other(s) had placed with them in a grave or on a pyre has nearly turned into a joke. The irony of the approach lies in the archaeologists’ reliance on portable material culture, turning them blind to other types of evidence, and their belief in its ability to be informative of past people’s practices, tastes, feelings, and worldviews. While this is not fundamentally erroneous, it raises two questions: is sex (or gender) what the objects ought to be representing, expressing, or constructing? And, if we assume this to be the case, what ought to be the consequence for our understanding of the hundreds of graves from Viking Age Denmark, which do not contain gender-specific grave-goods or any grave-goods at all?

This chapter seeks to interrogate the assumed necessity of gender representation in mortuary contexts, taking as its empirical starting point this category of widespread but oft-overlooked burials. After evaluating the current state of research concerning gender in Viking Age mortuary archaeology in Denmark, it moves on to present an overview of the phenomenon of grave-good deposition and its relative representation in the mortuary data, thus emphasizing the need for a new approach to the analysis of burial remains which accounts for the lack of gender-specific furnishings. It proposes that the scholar’s expectation of a gender representation is bound to Western notions of individuality and personhood underlining interpretations of burials, which may not be adequate to understand Viking Age society in Scandinavia.

In response to this, the concept of dividual personhood is proposed as a framework for the interpretation of burials without male/female representations, using low frequency and relationality in mortuary practices as a means of decentring the analysis from grave-goods as its main focus. It is then applied to a selected case study, the Viking Age burial ground at Galgedil on the island of Funen, where the excavation records and subsequent scientific analyses allow a refined interpretation of the potential identities and relationships among the buried community, which are not dependent on gender-specific objects. Acknowledging that our current understanding of Viking Age society is largely based on the study of a small group of extraordinary elite burials, this chapter concludes with a call for a more holistic view of the mortuary data and for increased efforts for considering all social groups in interaction.

Gender in Viking Age Mortuary Archaeology in Denmark

In contrast to the other Nordic countries, Danish archaeology has long remained relatively distant from feminist theory and from an explicitly gendered archaeology, although some awareness of especially male and female representations in mortuary contexts from the Viking Age has been present since the discipline’s early days. Engelhardt, who excavated and published many of the most famous burial finds from the Late Iron Age in the late nineteenth century, was keen to assign a probable sex as well as social status,² and

¹ Price 2020, 175.

² For example, for the Hvilehøj grave, ‘Udstyret viser, at det var et Kvinde liig’ (The furnishings show, that it was a female body), in Engelhardt 1881, 179.

Brøndsted, who produced a major overview of the Danish inhumation graves excavated to date (1936), offered some — albeit rather stereotypical — views on gendered differences.³

In the following decades, as the study of Viking Age burials dwindled and settlement archaeology was on the rise, mortuary practices and social roles inferred from mortuary contexts were rarely addressed. Overviews on the Viking Age written post-WWII made little room for gendered roles or the actions of male and female individuals.⁴ Ramskou, in his publications of Viking Age graves between the 1950s and 1970s, barely approached the question,⁵ at the same time as he enthusiastically wrote about men and women in his popular works.⁶ In parallel, the excavation of the cemeteries associated with the ring fortresses in Trelleborg and Fyrkat prompted the realization that both female and male individuals (as well as subadults) were buried there. But it was not until Else Roesdahl's thorough analysis of the artefact finds from Fyrkat in the early 1970s that it was acknowledged that these were not merely military camps inhabited by men, but communities with varied social compositions and purposes.⁷ In connection with her work on Fyrkat, Roesdahl published the burial finds from Sdr. Onsild.⁸ This led to several papers interpreting wagon-burials, typically associated with female individuals, as the equivalent of the equestrian burials typically associated with male members of the elite.⁹

The 1980s and 1990s saw the excavation and publication of a number of larger cemeteries, as well as the publication of a massive anthropological study of human remains from the Iron Age, including the Viking Age.¹⁰ Here, a short comparison of the gendered associations of grave-goods proposed by Brøndsted and of the biological sex of the deceased was presented which concluded that his assumptions were mostly correct.¹¹ As the goals of these publications were mainly to make data available, gender considerations remained brief, mostly limited to the identification of the sex/gender of the deceased on the basis of grave-goods association. The availability of greater amounts of data in the 1990s and 2000s prompted attempts to produce surveys, which then enabled quantitative analyses. In 1993, Kleiminger presented a catalogue

of all burial finds known to date.¹² Of all the topics he approached (regional variation, chronological variation, status, religious affinity), that of gender is minimally treated. Harnessing the potential of a large body of data, Gebühr produced a quantitative analysis of grave-goods associations, showing statistically significant groupings, which he related to male and female identities.¹³ In the same vein, Eisenschmidt produced important surveys focusing on particular regions or phenomena.¹⁴ While approaching the same range of 'typical topics' such as regional and chronological variation, she has also considered gendered representations more directly.

In the past couple of decades, the question of the roles and identities expressed in Viking Age mortuary contexts have become more nuanced in Danish research, thriving on the impetus from scholars outside of Denmark proposing new interpretations of Danish finds. Neil Price's interpretation of the Fyrkat grave 4,¹⁵ followed by a range of papers by Leszek Gardela,¹⁶ has prompted new studies on possible *völva* graves,¹⁷ and a new interest in possible *other* roles for Viking Age women in particular. New finds, such as the so-called 'Odin from Lejre', have triggered massive debates regarding the gender identification of the small figure,¹⁸ with prolonged echoes.¹⁹ Even if scholars rarely refer to queer theory, the character of the find made the question of gender ambiguity unavoidable. A noticeable exception in the Danish Viking Age research landscape (besides myself) is Bo Jensen, who has sought to problematize not only gender archaeology as it has often been practised around the turn of the millennium, that is, as woman's archaeology, but also the question of masculinity in the light of queer theory.²⁰ As ambiguity — which reflects the inadequacy of Western gender categories rather than the reality of past societies — becomes increasingly recognized, 'other-gendered' individuals have thus become at least a theoretical possibility in Viking Age mortuary archaeology in Denmark. Yet this discussion is usually bound to the detailed investigation of exceptional cases, focusing on extravagant artefacts or remarkable burials, and remains to be applied to new considerations of Viking Age society as a whole.

3 Brøndsted 1936, 222.

4 e.g., Ramskou 1962; Brøndsted 1965.

5 Ramskou 1951; 1976.

6 Ramskou 1967.

7 Roesdahl 1973; 1977.

8 Roesdahl 1976.

9 Roesdahl 2006; 2021; Pedersen 2014.

10 Sellevold and others 1984.

11 Sellevold and others 1984, 234–35.

12 Kleiminger 1993.

13 Gebühr 1994.

14 Eisenschmidt 1994; 2004.

15 Price 2002, 150–54.

16 Gardela 2008; 2021.

17 Pentz and others 2009; Ulriksen 2018.

18 Christensen 2010; Mannering 2010; Arwill Nordbladh 2014.

19 Borake 2021; Deckers and others 2021.

20 Jensen 2008; 2017.

Grave-Goods Deposition as Proxy for Viking Age Gendered Identities

The Viking Age mortuary landscape in Denmark resembles that of the rest of Scandinavia in the sense that there is no such thing as a 'typical' Viking Age burial. Tremendous diversity in mortuary practices can be observed archaeologically on a regional level, and even as locally as within one cemetery (especially in urban contexts). Both cremation and inhumation were practised, although cremation seems to have dwindled in the course of the tenth century.²¹ Regionally, cremations in urns, cremation deposits in pits, or cremation patches occurred; inhumations could take place in simple pits, but also in coffins, boats, or in wagon bodies and chambers in the second half of the tenth century in Jutland; graves could be marked by low barrows, but much older barrows (from the Neolithic and the Bronze Age) could also be reused.²²

Grave-goods, deposited objects, furnishings, etc. are recurring occurrences in Viking Age burials, in Denmark and elsewhere in Scandinavia in this period. Their mere presence, but also their quantity, diversity, pecuniary value, and evocative powers, are at the root of archaeologists' interpretation of multiple forms of religious and social identities, including gender-related identities.²³ Historically, archaeologists have used grave-goods as a proxy for social status in life. German early medieval archaeology defined the 'Qualitätsgruppe', in part based on readings of old Germanic law where the — gendered — dead were to be followed by their belongings, and where those without grave-goods were slaves or less important people.²⁴ A direct equation between burial expenditure and social status was at the root of the studies of death in American processual archaeology, using cross-cultural ethnographic data instead of law codes.²⁵ These 'mechanical' views have since been criticized with the propositions that it is an idealized version of social reality that is materialized in the burial ritual,²⁶ and that this reality can thus be constructed and manipulated on that occasion.²⁷ As tangible, portable expressions of identity, objects have retained a prominent role, perhaps also because of an assumed closer link to the deceased than other aspects of the mortuary rituals in their material iterations. As a

result, the premise behind most approaches to gender in mortuary archaeology is that gender was (is) one of the most important aspects of a person's identity, that gender is expressed/constructed/experienced through material culture, and that gender was a parameter in the elaboration and execution of mortuary treatments in the past.²⁸

Accepting the premise that identities may be represented and constructed through grave-goods, which can then be used as a proxy for discussing gender roles among the living, it is essential, for the sake of representativity, to establish some clarity about the extent of the phenomenon in the mortuary record. According to Eisenschmidt, c. 58 per cent of the 639 graves from Viking Age Denmark (excluding Hedeby) she recorded contained grave-goods, generally one or two items, with only about a quarter containing more than three items.²⁹ Although one or two items can be more likely to be associated with male or female material representations, they offer a rather precarious starting point for discussing the overall gender identity of the deceased. If we consider three grave-goods to be sufficient for suggesting a gender identity for the deceased, this is achievable for only about 14 per cent of the known (by 2004) mortuary records from Viking Age Denmark. Although potentially evocative and invaluable as sources, these 14 per cent are only representative of the gender representations of the segment of the population using them and, by virtue of this, should only be used as proxy for gender identities among the living with great caution and awareness of an important social bias towards those who had the means, or who felt necessary, to involve a relatively higher degree of expenditure in mortuary treatments.

This is most eloquently illustrated at the Langeland cemeteries. Between 1982 and 1989, the Langeland Museum excavated Viking Age graves at four different sites, reaching a total of 168 individuals buried in 161 graves.³⁰ Relatively good preservation conditions for bone material allowed the osteological analysis of 113 skeletons, leading to sex estimates for seventy-four individuals and age at death for eighty individuals. The mortuary practices present minor variation on a common theme centred on the inhumation of the human body. Parameters of variation in mortuary treatments could include the relatively rare presence of a container (coffin, wagon body, chamber), the position of the body and its orientation, and the deposition of grave-goods, with additional variation in terms of quantity and quality. Only a few graves can be qualified

21 See Kleiminger 1993; Eisenschmidt 2004 for the 'latest' overviews. Gerds 2015 only includes the eighth and ninth centuries.

22 Pedersen 2006; Thäte 2007.

23 Back Danielsson 2007.

24 Schülke 1999, 89.

25 See overview in Chapman 2014.

26 Hodder 1980.

27 Parker Pearsons 1982.

28 Sørensen 2009; Sofaer and Sørensen 2013.

29 Eisenschmidt 2004, 270.

30 Grøn and others 1994.

as lavish — on a very local scale — and generally, they show little evidence for wealth expenditure which can be documented archaeologically.³¹

In my doctoral dissertation, I used this regionally and chronologically coherent dataset to try to unravel the likelihood of association between artefact types (i.e., typical grave-goods assemblages) by means of a network analysis, and to assess the extent to which potential clusters may correlate to the biological sex of the deceased, thus testing the assumption of a binary gender system.³² My goal was, admittedly, to ‘sex metal’. The pattern that emerged seemed rather conclusive: jewellery, including beads, and dress fittings tended to cluster, with the addition of the occasional spindle-whorls, caskets, and keys; belt-fittings and a few weapons formed a second cluster. Comparison with the osteological sex estimates showed that these two clusters were dominated by biologically female and biologically male individuals respectively. Yet, the question of representativity arose. Of the 161 graves, sixty-seven did not contain any grave-goods at all, and seventy-five graves contained grave-goods which were neither specifically male nor female. The two gendered clusters are thus formed of nineteen graves, i.e., a little under 12 per cent of the dataset.

If the grave-goods of the two clusters were to be interpreted as representation and/or construction of a female and a male gendered identity in a mortuary context, what should then be the consequence for the interpretation of everyone else’s burials? Would they then be genderless, or would they belong to an extremely large ‘other-gendered’ group? Unfortunately, the use of objects in mortuary treatments has received much more scholarly attention than the lack thereof. In his major review on the meaning of grave-goods and grave-goods deposition practices in early medieval Europe, Heinrich Härke brushed very rapidly over the question of graves without grave-goods or gender-specific grave-goods, noticing that these represent varying proportions and that even graves without gender-specific kits would have at least a knife or a belt buckle.³³ Christianization is mentioned as one possible reason but cannot be the only explanation.

To sum up, the tradition of focusing on furnished burials in attempts to tease out evidence for discussing gender identities has led to emphasizing the norms and opportunities of a small minority which, by the token of considering mortuary expenditure as a relative reflection of social status, may have been among the more privileged members of society. Those who were

not buried or cremated with grave-goods have thus been left behind. Additionally, the fetishism of ‘sexing metal’ obliterates the informative power of other mortuary expressions and, herewith, the expressions of other gender representations than those typically defined as male and female. Thus, mortuary treatments without grave-goods in pre-Christian contexts are still in need of theoretical consideration if we are to explore the social identities of the absolute majority of Viking Age populations.

(In)dividuals and the Interpretation of Mortuary Data

A common assumption behind the social interpretations of mortuary remains is that of the identity one grave = one burial = one (human) body = one individual = one person. In this formula, the burial and its contents provide the contextual information for unravelling who the person was/was perceived to be, thus providing cues to their social identity.³⁴ While overall this may be a useful starting point as an analytical device, the implication that these items should be discrete and homogenous entities often falls short at explaining archaeological phenomena. A burial may be the product of a complex chain of events, among which later intrusions may disrupt its assumed integrity, for example when adding or removing bodies and things from the burial;³⁵ a body can be seen as a permeable and malleable entity composed of multiple parts,³⁶ which can be fragmented, reconfigured, and enhanced through additions and reductions, and even as a biotope made of multiple biological life forms;³⁷ the notion of individual, the smallest unit a human can be broken down to, has been challenged through that of the dividual, where the social human being is understood as a bundle of social relations;³⁸ a person, as a social agent,³⁹ does not have to be human,⁴⁰ and non-humans, things, animals, may act and held moral responsibility, for example in legal or religious situations.⁴¹ The unequal degree of materiality through which these notions are embodied provides at first sight unequal opportunities for partibility, as fragmenting and merging bodies and objects provide tangible enactment. Yet this quality is

31 Grøn and others 1994, 148–52.

32 Croix 2012, 50–52.

33 Härke 2014, 43–44.

34 The so-called ‘Saxe-Binford mortuary program,’ reviewed in Gillespie 2001, 76–78 and Chapman 2014, 49–50.

35 Klevnäs and others 2021.

36 Fowler 2004, 44–55.

37 Fredengren 2021.

38 *Sensu* Strathern 1988.

39 *Sensu* Harris 1989.

40 Harrison-Buck and Hendon (eds) 2018.

41 Heilskov 2022.

not a prerequisite and fragmentation of non-material entities is also possible.

At the core of this theoretical discussion and its potential archaeological application is the concept of personhood. Two ways of being a person have been discussed within anthropological research: individually, where the person has an inalienable, essential core and sense of self, which cannot be altered without producing a different person; dividually, where the person is 'a fractured and relational entity interpermeated with other selves', made of multiple dimensions.⁴² While these two acceptions have been opposed as reflecting a Western/non-Western dichotomy, current debates consider that both may be present at once, within the same cultures and the same persons, owing to the porosity of the subject and the variable degrees to which dividuality and individuality can be entangled.⁴³

The concept of the dividual was brought to the fore by Marilyn Strathern, who proposed that in Melanesia, her ethnographic case study, a person may be described as 'the plural and composite site of the relationships that produced them', whether these relationships involve other humans or non-humans (materials, things, animals).⁴⁴ These relationships are established and objectified through social actions involving the circulation of things, for example through gift-giving, which thus act as externalized parts of the persons. As relationships change, so do the dividual persons. In this manner, dividual personhood is also relational personhood, in which, like atoms, no persons are defined on their own but through their relatedness to others.⁴⁵ Multiple social mechanisms, as means of sorting out people, things, bodies, and so on, may be set into motion to articulate these relationships. Kinship in particular has been under scrutiny for its ability to create a 'mutuality of being',⁴⁶ in which kin members are *by* and *of* each other. Also, age, sex and gender, life course, and power have been raised as factors affecting interpersonal relationships.⁴⁷

Personhood has been a focus of archaeological research for the past twenty years, harnessing the potential of mortuary archaeology to approach dividual personhood in particular. Often, scholars have taken the notion of partibility quite literally, seeing the separate burial of body parts as a reflection of the dividuality of the person or the involvement of objects

and animals as participating in the reconfiguration of the dividual — dead — person through that of their relationships with the mourners.⁴⁸ The archaeology of Late Iron Age societies in Scandinavia is no exception, with multiple studies approaching fragmented objects and bodies,⁴⁹ hybridity,⁵⁰ body-objects,⁵¹ as well as transhuman kinship and personhood,⁵² especially in relation to multiple burials.⁵³ Apart from in relation to bodies, the concept of *odal*, inalienable property,⁵⁴ transcended time and death by being both of the living, of the dead, and presumably of those to come as well. Property as a correlate of individuality, as conceived in Western thought, thus does not seem to have applied in Viking Age Scandinavia. The tension between individual and collective, as difficult as it may be as an object of inquiry in this historical context,⁵⁵ may have varied greatly depending on social status — the elite may have enjoyed a higher degree of individual freedom but may also have been bound by specific obligations, while the non-elite, some deprived of freedom entirely, may have had other opportunities for individual agency while being subdued to social control.

Thus, could a social group, defined through kinship or other bonds, be considered as one person made of multiple bodies? Death and the ensuing mortuary treatments could provide opportunities where the integrity of bodies, individuals, and persons were challenged, as they lay at the intersection between them and the community that remains in this world, as well as the community in the world beyond.⁵⁶ On those occasions, the community commemorates and transforms itself into new constellations, as one social body formed of multiple social bodies. At the same time, death and mortuary treatments can reshape the dead person, both physically and figuratively, utilizing their dividuality to enhance and/or erase some of the traits pertaining to their social identity. Thus, mortuary treatments can be seen as some of the 'modes of action that individualize, or make permeable or essentialize' and as 'events in which a person is made more or less indivisible'.⁵⁷

As gender participates in social identity, both self-ascribed and projected, and as it is continuously

42 See synthesis and discussion in Smith 2012; quote from Brück 2006, 311.

43 Englund and Leach 2000, 229; Smith 2012; Fowler 2016.

44 Strathern 1988, quote p. 13.

45 As proposed, for example, for the Early Bronze Age in Ireland and Britain, see Brück 2004.

46 Sahlins 2011.

47 e.g., summarized in Fowler 2005.

48 e.g., Chapman 2000; Brück 2004; 2006; Jones 2005; Rebay-Salisbury and others (eds) 2010.

49 Lund 2013.

50 Hedeager 2010; Croix 2023.

51 Eriksen 2020.

52 Eriksen and Kay 2022.

53 Ratican 2020.

54 Zachrisson 2017.

55 Christiansen 2001, 10–37.

56 Fahlander and Oestigaard 2008.

57 Fowler 2016, 403.

shaped in relation to others, it could be reconfigured, erased, or enhanced through mortuary treatments depending on the set of relations it played into. Keeping in mind the potentiality of material culture in ritualized expressions, the dress of the deceased, with its multiple components and fittings, may have been able to perform the qualities — including gendered ones — of the human persons as their lifeless bodies were no longer able to do so. However, if gender may be enhanced, it may also be erased if other aspects of the individuals' identities were of greater importance to the mourners. Thus, could a lack of material differentiation in mortuary treatments achieve the same effect as actual physical merging in an effort to dissolve persons bound to single bodies? Could particular forms of mortuary representations be a response to the perceived need to elevate the group over the individual? Could mortuary treatments thus be about commemorating relationships rather than persons?

In an effort to address these questions, it is necessary to elaborate a methodological approach to Viking Age mortuary practices decentred from the equation one burial = one person, in which the interpretation of grave-goods is one but not the most important dimension, and which may enable identifying further parameters than those defined by an assumed norm. The concept of deviancy may, at first sight, prompt such a shift in focus.⁵⁸ In her assessment of the commemorative mortuary landscape of Late Iron Age Scandinavia, Eva Thäte proposed a classification system for 'deviant' burials based on the following criteria:⁵⁹

- Deviant orientation of the body/the grave
- Deviant position of the body in the grave
- Multiple, reused, and intersecting burials
- Physical 'abnormality' in the skeletal evidence (injury, handicap)
- Special treatment of the body (decapitation, tied limbs, stones placed on the body, knife in hand)
- Unusual grave-goods (fossils, shells, etc.) with no obvious [to us] practical function.

Thäte's own conclusion was that the range of variation in mortuary practices ought to reflect a range of possible motivations so broad that it more or less nullified the idea of deviancy, especially concerning multiple burials.⁶⁰ In her recent doctoral dissertation, Claire Ratican corroborated this conclusion,⁶¹ based on a close analysis of multiple burials as a way of addressing

personhood and entanglements across ontological boundaries. In the meantime, other studies have also shown that there are — too — many burials fitting the 'deviant' criteria at communal cemeteries, suggesting that at least in death these persons were integrated into the 'regular' community.⁶²

While Thäte's study has shown that social deviancy and alienation cannot directly be addressed through mortuary treatments, its methodological framework is useful, nonetheless. It shows the need to situate such practices in the context of their own burial ground and to discuss their significance by assessing the frequency of their occurrence. By crossing several parameters such as sex and age in order to understand which aspects of personal identities lay behind the associations created by co-burial, it also prompts the need to consider spatial and material relations between bodies, within graves and between graves. Together, addressing the low frequency and relationality of mortuary practices can achieve the goal of 'decentring' the analytical process away from the individual and towards the — potentially — *dividual*, and to assess the role of sex and gender in this complex interplay.

After an introduction to the site that will be used as a case study, Galgedil, the following section will analyse sexual variation in mortuary treatments, following the binary (male/female) biological assessment of human bodies through osteology or genomics. Although biological sex does not need to align with a binary gender identity, especially in death in a Viking Age Scandinavian context gender representations as male and female *tend* to correspond, when present, to the biological categories of male and female.⁶³ Using these standard categories as a starting point may help to identify original or alternative forms of gender identities. At a later stage, focus will be placed on artefacts present in graves, while the contemporary burial finds from the island of Langeland, south of the island of Funen where Galgedil is located, will be used to provide comparison and perspective.

Case Study: Galgedil

In 1999 and 2005, the Museum Odense conducted extensive excavations at Galgedil on the island of Funen. Exceptionally for a developer-led excavation, the site is considered to be nearly fully excavated, despite major disturbances caused by modern gravel extraction in several areas. For the purpose of this study, I have selected and compiled question-driven data from the primary

⁵⁸ See nuanced discussions and alternatives to the word 'deviancy' in Murphy (ed.) 2008.

⁵⁹ Thäte 2007, 266–67.

⁶⁰ Thäte 2007, 272–73.

⁶¹ Ratican 2020, 278.

⁶² Gardela 2017, 25 with references.

⁶³ Croix 2012, 43–56; Moen 2019, 116–29.

excavation reports,⁶⁴ supplemented with the published results of scientific analyses.⁶⁵ As the majority of the burials are inhumation, the data was structured to fit the descriptive characteristics of this type of feature and is summarized in Table 10.1. Fifty-six features have been interpreted as certain burials, fifty-four inhumations and two cremation deposits, and two as possible and/or disturbed burial features. The fill of several graves also contained cremated human remains, a phenomenon which seems to have been rather widespread but remains to be fully studied.⁶⁶ Bone preservation in inhumation graves was relatively good, which allowed osteological analysis of the human remains (forty-seven individuals), as well as DNA analyses (eleven individuals) and multiple isotopic analyses (thirty-six individuals for strontium and forty for carbon and nitrogen isotopes). Artefact types and radiocarbon dates support an active phase of the site spanning the whole Viking Age,⁶⁷ with graves being grouped into two main phases: phase I (ninth–tenth centuries) and phase II (late tenth–first half of the eleventh centuries).

By considering the frequency of burial practices at the Galgedil cemetery and their association with biological sex, the overall impression that emerges is that of diversity, integration, and fluidity. None (but one) of the less frequent ('deviant') mortuary traits seems exclusively associated with one biological sex rather than the other, with only occasional, quantitatively non-representative tendencies. The norm for inhumations was to lay bodies in a more or less supine position down into bare pits, occasionally into coffins of various types, and more rarely into small chambers. None of these inhumation forms seems significantly associated with one biological sex more often than the other and, while a crouched position occurs slightly more often for female than for male individuals, it does not do so exclusively. Male bodies were slightly more likely to be laid with an orientation deviating from the norm (W–NW–W) but, here again, not exclusively.

Associated burials, i.e., multiple, reused, or intersecting burials are relatively common at Galgedil, concerning twenty-one individuals and twelve burial relations (some individuals being involved in more than one). These relations could be established 1) simultaneously, when bodies were laid either next to or on top of one another, or 2) a posteriori, where a grave was reused for a second burial or where a new grave was cut into a previous burial. Other forms of

'pairing' (3) also occurred, which involved close spatial connection and parallelism in orientation between burials and/or bodies, or even the deposition of parts of the same animal in two different graves. Male and female individuals are almost equally represented in associated burials, and there is no stronger association between one or the other biological sex and the three different types.

Just as association may be read in mortuary treatments, so can social exclusion. Relatively more female individuals seem spatially excluded from the main grave clusters, but here again the numbers are very small. The rare bodily modification of filled teeth is exclusively male, but other low-frequency practices such as the placing of stones near or on the body are too rare or heterogenous to be conclusive from a gender perspective. While more than half of the graves display at least one less frequent trait, which are more or less equally divided between biologically male and female individuals, several graves present multiple (orientation, knife position, body position, etc.). These are slightly more likely to be male, and some of these low-frequency traits are only attested with one or the other sex at Galgedil, but parallels at other sites show that this is not always the rule.⁶⁸

The same seems to hold true for the deposition of objects in graves, with some few exceptions. The practice of involving objects in mortuary treatments was relatively common at Galgedil throughout both site phases, with a slight decrease from phase I to phase II. For some objects, their function and position in relation to the body suggest that they were part of the dead's attire, including metal dress fittings and ornaments (belt buckles, beads, trefoil brooch, strap-end, oval brooches). Except for belt buckles, these items have traditionally been gendered as either male or female. Daily implements (hone, key/padlock, comb, awl) also occur, a single iron knife largely dominating the picture with thirty instances. Finally, a single grave contained an axe. These items can be considered neutral in gender terms, with the exception of keys/padlock and the axe, which are typically gendered as female and male respectively, but which only in one case are associated with matching gendered items here. This brings the total figure for burials for which gender representation was achieved through material culture at Galgedil to twelve, eight female and four male. In all but one case, where the human remains were too poorly preserved to estimate the biological sex, the gender representation as male or female through grave-goods aligns with the biological sex of the deceased.

64 Coll 2018.

65 Price and others 2015; Margaryan and others 2020, supplementary materials.

66 Ulriksen 2011; Satalecki 2016.

67 Price and others 2015, 130–31; Cordes and others 2022.

68 The example of large boulders placed on a male individual at Galgedil is counterbalanced by that of a female individual at Gerdrup, Kastholm and Margaryan 2021.

As a result, a gendered (male/female) identity is not part of the mortuary representations for a large majority of the Galgedil population (forty-two individuals). However, when considering how a 'neutral' object such as a knife may be used in different ways, gendered variation appears. Indeed, knives are more likely to be part of the belt set (sometimes with hone and belt buckle) in male burials. Knives could also be placed on the upper body and, more rarely, under the body. While it has been suggested that knives on the upper body reflect that they were worn hanging around the neck,⁶⁹ an example from Langeland, where a knife had been carefully rolled in a piece of cloth together with a hone, suggests that these items were not necessarily part of the dress.⁷⁰ Similarly, knives with no direct relation to the body might relate to some apotropaic practices, in which they can be found stuck into the ground or the walls of the grave pit.⁷¹ This unusual position of the knife is not more commonly associated with either male or female individuals at Galgedil.

In contrast, knives were retrieved from between the body's legs in three instances. In the first instance, the knife was placed between the thighs of a female individual, pointing towards her feet. She wore a trefoil brooch just above the hip region instead of on the upper chest region, as if it was used as a belt buckle rather than as a shawl fitting. Remarkably, this use is consistent with a unique piece of Viking Age iconography, the Revninge figure found near Ladby, which, like Galgedil, was part of the cultural landscape of the Odense fjord region, and whose gender identity has been debated due to its ambiguity.⁷² For the second example, the knife was retrieved pointing upwards on the inner side of the right knee of a female individual, whose right hand had also been placed under her right thigh. Bones from a newborn were also retrieved from this grave. The third is the only example of a burial with two knives: the first, placed by the lower left arm of a male individual in the belt region together with a hone and a belt buckle, may have been part of his personal attire; the second was placed between his spread legs with the tip pointing towards his feet and may have had another meaning.

In those three cases, the position of the knives hardly seems accidental. The third example shows multiple similarities with female grave BA at Bogøvej, both being mature individuals inhumed in exclusive coffins.⁷³ A long knife pointing towards her feet was laid on her lap together with a hone, and a smaller knife was placed

on her right breast close to a set of five beads. Her left hand rested on her lower belly, so that it might have held the long knife. The performative gesture of placing the hand of the dead so that they seem to be holding a knife may be an echo, together with aspects of the mortuary practices, of particular functions in life, perhaps as prominent members of their community in charge of ritual sacrifices.⁷⁴ It might also be seen as an expression of gender transgression and ambiguity, the evidence from Galgedil and Bogøvej involving individuals of both sexes and displaying both male and female gendered representations. Along those lines, the intentional deposition of a knife between the spread legs of the male individual at Galgedil is reminiscent of the famous single warrior grave from Repton, England. The wild boar tusk deposited between his thighs has been interpreted as a form of compensation for the damage caused to his masculinity in the literal sense of a violent castration.⁷⁵ The Galgedil example does not seem to have suffered such a fate, but the placement of the knife may have been meant to achieve a similar purpose if his masculinity was to be sustained and/or had been fragilized.

Objects in graves, although not rare at Galgedil, suggest a gender representation aligning with the biological sex of the deceased in a relatively small number of cases, some of which concern individuals displaying several low-frequency traits in their mortuary treatments and some signs of gender ambiguity. The relative bias in favour of female representation may be explained by clothing styles making different use of metal fittings, which are the only preserved elements of dress here. In the light of the extreme range of variation in mortuary treatments and how many burials display at least one low-frequency trait, these can hardly be read as 'deviant' burials and interpreted as magic or as an expression of a marginalized social status. Instead, the associations between burials, as well as the gender neutrality of most mortuary treatments, are striking. Rather than individual expressions, the burials ought to be considered relationally, as should the bodies and persons in them. As a result, gender identities on an individual basis seem to have been of little relevance for mortuary representations.

Discussion

A crucial realization which has emerged from the analysis of the mortuary practices at the Viking Age burial ground at Galgedil is that the materialization of interpersonal relations through associated burial seems

69 Gardela 2017, 81.

70 Hesselbjergmarken Grav B, Grøn and others 1994, 50–51.

71 See e.g., Nordberg 2002 and Gardela 2013, 114–15.

72 Feveile 2015; Croix and others 2015.

73 Grøn and others 1994, 30–34.

74 Croix (forthcoming).

75 Hadley 2008.

to have been a greater concern than the representation of the individuals' gender identities. By shifting focus away from the individualizing interpretation of single burials via grave-goods, the study of the frequency and relationality of the mortuary treatments at Galgedil suggests an overall high degree of social integration among the buried population and that all interred were effectively persons. This raises a series of questions:

- 1) Did the personal identities (sex/gender, age, status) of the deceased play a role in these associations?
- 2) Were these associations created in death only?
- 3) What would have been the need to do so?
- 4) What is the implication for our understanding of identities and personhood?

1) At Galgedil, as in other parts of the Viking world,⁷⁶ individuals of male and female biological sexes are almost equally represented in associated burials, and there is no stronger association between one or the other biological sex and different types of associated burial (Fig. 10.1). Owing to the small size of the sample, combined with the degree of variation in this practice, it is impossible to identify any significant pattern. Association through parallel burials seems to apply to male–female pairs; and the only two juveniles (age fifteen to sixteen) buried at the site were involved in associated burials. Although age difference, with the males being older than the females, has previously been advanced as an argument for the pairs being married couples, it has not been confirmed by a larger sample,⁷⁷ nor by the Galgedil case, where male–female pairs appear to be approximately the same age or with a younger male. Both male–male and female–female associations occur at Galgedil, perhaps suggesting bonds of mentoring,⁷⁸ if not of kinship, friendship, or other kinds of partnership.

Whether the individuals involved in associated burials were of different status can hardly be settled based on grave-goods deposition, as for several examples these were absent for all the individuals involved. Looking at orientation in terms of biological sex is unhelpful, as there are instances of reversed orientation for male–female pairs, but also instances of similar orientation in such pairs, as well as similar orientation for male–male pairs and of reverse orientation in female–female pairs. Additionally, the instances of double or even triple associations suggest webs of interpersonal relations extending beyond the 1:1 relation implied by the notion of 'master–slave'. Biomolecular approaches

have previously contributed with information on differential diet supporting differential social status, at Galgedil and elsewhere.⁷⁹ Paradoxically, other deviant diet patterns at Galgedil have been interpreted as an indicator of mobility rather than status, which means that the interpretation of status difference is based on the fact that they are associated burials.

Alternative social bonds thus need to be considered. Just as indicators of differential diet can be interpreted as evidence for differential status, they may suggest an absence of biological relations (assuming that kin would have similar lifestyles).⁸⁰ These relations, often assumed to represent kin groups, need to be reconsidered as advances in ancient genomics are increasingly able to identify biodistances between individuals.⁸¹ One of the classical examples of 'master–slave' burial, that at Gerdrup on Sjælland, Denmark, has recently undergone a major reassessment as the two individuals were shown to be biological mother and son.⁸² Unfortunately, none of the associated burials at Galgedil were fully DNA sequenced, and no biodistance was positively identified.⁸³ As the temporal sequence in consecutive burials cannot be established at the moment, one cannot exclude that biological children were buried as adults in their parents' graves several decades later at Galgedil.

2) Whether these ties reflect lived ties prior to death or whether they were created posthumously is an important but elusive question. The different temporalities in associated burials, either as contemporary (multiple/paired) or consecutive (secondary/intersecting), suggest different functions and motives for these associations. Rather than seeing them as carelessness, laziness, or pragmatism, associated burials may have created kinship ties. The temporality of the burial can inform us about the character of those ties. Some occurred immediately (i.e., multiple burials at the same time), some after partial skeletonization of the first body, whose remains were then shuffled around. In such cases, the grave was not 'fresh', and this was not done to avoid digging a new hole; the memory of who was there first was perhaps still alive. Thus, consecutive burials especially may have shaped bonds that transcended time, as some of the individuals involved may not even have known one another.⁸⁴

Some examples at Galgedil are particularly salient. The paired burials with parts of — probably — the same sheep deposited on the corpses' lower right leg/foot suggest that they were interred within a very short

⁷⁶ Ratican 2020, 69.

⁷⁷ Ratican 2020, 77 with references.

⁷⁸ Ratican 2020, 78–81, with references.

⁷⁹ Price and others 2015, 140–41; cf. Naumann and others 2014.

⁸⁰ Naumann and others 2014, 538.

⁸¹ Margaryan and others 2020.

⁸² Kastholm and Margaryan 2021.

⁸³ Margaryan and others 2020.

⁸⁴ Ratican 2020, 116–23.

time span from one another. Perhaps one could see the fragmentation of the animal as a reverse procedure aimed at creating a new ‘whole’ out of two distinct persons.⁸⁵ Although the burials of children (<fifteen to sixteen years old) are rare at Galgedil, they present an interesting distinction based on age at death: the three burials of children who passed away at the age of three to four, six, and nine were buried individually (though without a knife), while the two burials of very young infants/newborns occurred together with female adults. In the first case, a biological parent/child bond can probably be excluded as an interpretation for co-burial. Burial WG contained the remain of a local^{Sr} adult female (c. fifty) lying supine with the head to the west. The young infant lay on her body, probably across her belly. Her legs were tightly close below the knees, her right hand was placed under her thigh, and her left hand perhaps on the infant. Price and others left this burial out of their discussion of the site, probably because it appears as a biological impossibility irreconcilable with their interpretation of the second female grave, age c. twenty-five, which contained the remains of a newborn and which they explained as belonging to a woman who died in childbirth (grave XJ).⁸⁶

But what if this second woman did not die in childbirth, and if the child was not hers? As grave WG suggests, as well as early modern examples,⁸⁷ biological mother/child bonds may not necessarily be the reason for joint internment. The bodies of subadults, especially young infants, were treated in a variety of ways, possibly owing to the notion that they were not yet fully recognized as persons.⁸⁸ Alternatively, they may have been seen as requiring particular care in death from an adult, or as powerful agents facilitating the mortuary process of the adult they accompanied, or as entities needing to be controlled.⁸⁹ At Galgedil, both adult bodies showed the same, unusual position, with their right hand placed under their right thigh, effectively hindering the hand from movement. Could this gesture express a form of inability referring to the — hypothetical — fact that these women died childless? Could their social status, relating to kinship, have required it of them, and would the deposition of infants be a way of constructing motherhood posthumously?

3) This brings us to consider what would be the need for the materialization of social relationships in mortuary contexts. A common understanding of mortuary rituals

and their materiality is that they were aimed at navigating a situation in which the social fabric, emotions, economic sustainability, and perhaps even the cosmological order were fragilized by the death of a member of the community. In that light, physical associations between bodies might be hypothesized to occur to stabilize a precarious relation. Overall, the Galgedil community appears relatively mobile, especially for a seemingly small, rural agrarian population in the middle of the island of Funen. The isotopic data suggests mobility from a place of birth and early childhood other than the current territories of Denmark (and most of the southern coastal regions of the North Sea) for several individuals; genetic data for six individuals showed a dominating ancestry other than Danish — and one ‘local’ had a near parent buried in Oxford;⁹⁰ the otherwise rare custom of filled teeth is attested with no less than four instances.⁹¹

Was this general instability the reason for reaffirming bonds, biological or not, between those who died ‘at home’? The practice of multiple burials as a response to situations of stress has been suggested for the new settlements of the western diaspora of the Viking world.⁹² At Galgedil, non-local^{Sr} individuals and those with other genetic ancestries are involved in associated burials, but not more saliently than others. As neither fine variation in mortuary treatments or selection of grave-goods point towards practices and ideas which could not be encountered locally, non-local cultural affinities are not perceptible. Thus, non-local biological or geographical ancestry was not treated as grounds for social distinction but does not seem to have led to a stronger association either.

4) The concept of dividual identities may help to bring some clarity to these questions. Dividuality sees each person as composed of multiple parts, some of which shared with or being defined through their relation to others.⁹³ If physical associations between burials had the power to create bonds of kinship transcending time, they could also transcend individual integrity. This might explain the practices of burial association, but even in cases without association, relational identities may have been a factor of mortuary treatment as well, in which case they could prevail over individual identities. By this token, the embodied experience and performance of gender, if seen as only relevant for the individual, would have been toned down, and their role within their multiple social constellations (the kin in its social rather than biological sense, the community, the village) may

85 Cf. Chapman 2000.

86 Price and others 2015, 133.

87 Krzewinska and others 2021.

88 Eriksen 2017; Croix 2021.

89 Ratican 2020, 165 with refs.

90 Margaryan and others 2020; Cordes and others 2022.

91 Arcini 2005.

92 Ratican 2020, 277–79.

93 Cf. Strathern 1988 and discussion in section 3.

have been what ought to be valued and remembered. The fact, however, that it was more clearly represented for some individuals than others suggests different opportunities and occasions where individuality was more salient than relationships. This might apply to the few individuals for whom a gender identity was constructed and represented materially, possibly because this identity was decisive for the role they played in the social constellations in which they were involved.

The fading of social differences in mortuary treatments is otherwise often related to the introduction of Christianity in a pre-Christian Scandinavian context. In Denmark, this development is typically situated around the beginning of the ninth century. Although not actually forbidden,⁹⁴ the practice of involving material culture in mortuary treatments through burial deposition dwindled with the new faith, in alignment with the notion of equality of the faithful in front of God, the human being *being* of God and God *being* of them. Although other forms of social distinction were used at Christian cemeteries in early medieval and medieval times (such as the relative distance of a burial to a holy shrine), personal identities besides status were barely perceptible. A north–south division between female and male burials occurred up to the thirteenth century,⁹⁵ but was far from ubiquitous, and had little to no theological foundation.⁹⁶

The increasing rarity of furnished burials and the general erasure of social distinctions clearly accelerated after the year 1000, although the exact chronology remains to be established. However, it does not need to be explained through religious change or even the influence of a different cultural system. The pre-Christian Scandinavian mindset was populated by complex ontologies, including hybridity, other-than-human agents, and human body-objects. Within such a framework, dividual identities, where shared identities trump individual self-definition, not only seem plausible; they are even likely. Thus, genderless graves may be read as a form of erasing of individual identity in favour of dividual identities defined through the person's role within the social group.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to address a surprising caveat in Viking Age mortuary archaeology in Denmark: how are burials without grave-goods, which form the absolute majority of burial finds for this period, to be interpreted in terms of sex and gender identities, or to be interpreted

at all? An exploration of the research history has revealed that there are several explanations for such a caveat: first, it belongs to a research area in which gender aspects have overall played a minor role until very recently; second, archaeologists have traditionally heavily relied on the principle that grave-goods are a necessary entryway for interpretations of identities in mortuary contexts; third, interpretations are guided by an archaeological tradition emerging from Western thought where the body, the person, the individual are conflated as one unit and as the focus point of the interpretation of burials.

However, recent debates concerning personhood, ontologies, and identities, across time and space and within a Late Iron Age, Scandinavian context, have stressed the need to consider more fluid and permeable forms of being, to which sex and gender identity could contribute to various degrees and ways. To test this proposal as an explanatory framework for Viking Age mortuary treatments, the analysis used a case study, that of the burial ground at Galgedil on Funen, and considered its mortuary practices from the perspective of low-frequency and relational practices, as a way of decentring the approach from the conventional and individualizing focus on grave-goods.

As a result, gender appears to have been a minor concern for the elaboration of mortuary treatments, while interpersonal relations seem to have played a much greater role. The consequences of this realization are potentially far reaching. Indeed, the mortuary treatments given to single bodies in individual burials may be more telling of the web of social ties this person was involved in, and which aspects of their identity defined these roles, than of their identity as such. While this is in alignment with concepts of relational and dividual personhood, these need to be much more widely acknowledged and integrated into the study and social interpretation of burials. By freeing ourselves from our reliance on grave-goods, we might be able to consider Viking Age society with greater nuances, acknowledging the complexity of the social interplay and recognizing gender as a complex phenomenon 'activated' in particular situations, which did not only pertain to the privileged classes.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the Danish National Research Foundation under the grant DNRF119 — Centre of Excellence for Urban Network Evolutions (UrbNet). I am particularly thankful to Mogens Bo Henriksen for sharing the unpublished excavation report for the Galgedil site with me, as well as to the editors of this volume, the project group, and the peer reviewer for excellent comments throughout this process.

⁹⁴ Christensen and Bjerregaard 2021, 252.

⁹⁵ Kieffer-Olsen 1993, 99–121.

⁹⁶ Jürgensen 2009; Nilsson 1994, xxx.

Table 10.1. Synthetic table compiling question-driven data for the Galgedil burial ground.

Biological sex, M: male, F: female; Sr: Strontium, L: local, NL: non-local; Ancestry, D: 'Danish-like', P: 'Polish-like', S: 'Swedish-like', N: 'Norwegian-like', SE: 'South-European-like'; Orientation: first cardinal means head to; Body position, L: left, R: right; Gender, M: male, F: female, N: neither/unknown. Sources: OBM4520 Galgedil; Margaryan and others 2020; Price and others 2015.

Grave ID	Biological sex	Age	Sr	Ancestry	Knives	Orientation	Container	Body position	Phase	Knife position	Note	Gender	Other grave-goods	Isolated/associated	Low frequency traits
AJG	F	20–30	L		1	NE–SW		Supine	II	Lower arm/hip region	Genetically related to AKJ?	N		Isolated	1
AKJ	F?	40–50?	L		1	NW–SE		Supine	II	Lower arm/hip region	Genetically related to AJG?	N		Isolated	1
ALX	M?	30–40	L		1	E–W		Supine	II	Under R shoulder blade	Filled teeth	N			4
ALY (VK135)	F	30–40	L			SW–NE		Crouched (L)	II			N			1
ALZ (VK134)	M	>45	L	'D'		SE–NW		Supine	II	Upper body	Filled teeth?	N			2
AMA	F	>50	L			SE–NW		Supine	II	Lower arm/hip region		N			1
AMB	F	35–45	NL			NW–SE		Supine	II	Upper body		N			
AMC	F?	>45	L		1	NW–SE		Supine	II	Upper body		N			
AMD	X	3 to 4				NW–SE		Crouched?	II			N			
ANG (VK139)	M	35–45		'P'		W–E		Supine	II			N			
ANO (VK370)	M?	35–45	L	'D'		NW–SE		Supine	II			N			
AQB	?	Grown			1	WNW–ESE	Coffin	Supine?	I	By W gable end of coffin		N			1
AQP	F	>45			1	N–S	Coffin	Supine	I	Between the thighs		F?	Trefoil brooch		1
AQQ _{upper} (W)	M	25–30	L		1	S–N	On a wooden plank	Supine	I	Lower arm/hip region		N		Paired_AQP Simultaneous_AQQ_lower	2

Grave ID	Biological sex	Age	Sr	Ancestry	Knives	Orientation	Container	Body position	Phase	Knife position	Note	Gender	Other grave-goods	Isolated/ associated	Low frequency traits
AQQ_lower (E)	M	>45	L		2	S-N	Coffin (small boat, wagon body?)	Supine, frog-like legs	I	1) Lower arm/hip region 2) Between legs		M?	Hone, silver belt buckle, strap-end	Paired_AQP Simultaneous_AQQ_upper	4
AXE (VK279)	M	>50	L	'D'+ 'S'		NW-SE		Supine	II		Has a 2nd degree male relative in Oxford!	N			
BER (VK373)	M	>40		'D'	1	NE-SW	Coffin	Supine	I	Lower arm/hip region	Human cremains? in fill	N	Hone		
BEW	M?	Adult			1	SW-NE		Supine	II	Lower arm/hip region	Under 2 large boulders; pit too small for the body	N	Hone, unID iron object	Isolated	3
BFQ (VK141)	F	>50	L	'D'	1	N-S		Fully crouched (R)	II	Lower arm/hip region		F	Hone, belt buckle, comb, amber bead, iron plate with 3 beads	Isolated	
AA	M	25-35	L		1	N-S		Supine	I	Lower arm/hip region	Filled teeth	N	1 Cu-alloy frag., animal remains		
DS	F	Adult				W-E		Supine	I			F	2 oval brooches	Isolated	1
KL_1		25-35	L			SSE-NNW		Supine	I			N		Simultaneous_KL_2	2
KL_2	M	50	L			NNW-SSE		Crouched (disturbed)	I			M?	2 belt buckles, strap-end, nail	Simultaneous_KL_1	1
KM (VK372)	F	>50	L	'N'	1	WSW-ENE		Semi-crouched (R)	I	Upper body	Human cremains? in fill	N			
KN		Adult				E-W		Supine	I			N			1
KO (VK133)	M	16			1	N-S		Crouched (R)	I	Lower arm/hip region	Part of sheep on top of R foot	N	Awl/pren	Paired_shared deposit_UO	
KQ		50+	L		1	W-E		Supine (disturbed)	I	Upper body		N			

KR	M	40+	L	1	WNW-ESE	Supine	I	Lower arm/hip region	Top of the cranium damaged (at burial?)	N	Sheep/goat tooth
KU		9			NE-SW	Supine (disturbed)	I			N	
LC		Adult		1	NE-SW	Crouched (R)	I	Lower arm/hip region		N	
LD_1	M	30-35		1	W-E	Chamber	Supine? (disturbed)	?		N	A posteriori_LD_2_1
LD_2		15-16			W-E	Chamber	Supine	I		N	A posteriori_LD_1_1
LS (VK446)	M	M	35-45	1	N-S	Supine	I	Lower arm/hip region	Cremains in fill	N	Hone, pig bones, iron object
PB	M	25-35	L		NW-SE	Chamber?	Supine	I		N	
PF (VK140)	M	25-35			W-E	Supine	I		Filled teeth; cremains in fill	N	1
QJ		6			SE-NW	Crouched (R)	I			N	1
SB	M?	35-45	L		W-E	Crouched (L), hand- and foot bones missing	I		4 stones	N	Few frag. horse bone and teeth on belly
SG	F	40+	L	1	NW-SE	Wooden board?	Crouched, fully (L)	I	Lower arm/hip region	F	Key; belt buckle? suspension for knife?
SQ	M?	45+	L	1(?)	N-S		Supine	I	Lower arm/hip region	N	Belt buckle
TA	M	45+	NL		NW-SE		Supine	II		N	Hone, bird?
TQ (VK278)	F	35-45	L	'SE'/'D'	NW-SE	Supine, bound feet (?)	I			N	Iron threads A posteriori_TR_1
TR_1	M	25-35	L		SE-NW	Supine	I			N	A posteriori_TQ_2 Simultaneous_TR_2
TR_2	F	30+			NW-SE	Supine	I			N	A posteriori_TQ_1 Simultaneous_TR_1

Grave ID	Biological sex	Age	Sr	Ancestry	Knives	Orientation	Container	Body position	Phase	Knife position	Note	Gender	Other grave-goods	Isolated/ associated	Low frequency traits
TT (VK411)	M	30-40 (35)	L		1	W-E	Coffin?	Supine	I	Upper body		M?	Strap fitting, strap-end?, unID iron object, hone; human and animal bones deposit		
TY						W-E		? (a single leg)	I		Human and animal cremains	F	Glass bead, iron fitting, iron nail		
UD-Vest (VK371)	M	30-35	NL		1	NW-SE	Coffin?	Supine	I	Upper body	Cremains	N	2 animal bones (?)	Simultaneous UD_Ø	1
UD-Øst	F?	45+	NL 'P' / 'S'			SE-NW	Coffin?	Crouched (L)	I		Cremains	N	Cow tooth	Simultaneous UD_V	2
UK	F	35-45	L		1	W-E		Supine, bound legs?	I	Under ribcage	Plundered and disturbed? 2 small stones on top and under the knees	F	Glass beads	Paired_UL	2
UL	M	30	L			W-E		Supine	I			M?	Axe, young goat/sheep; glass bead (relation?)	Paired_UK	
UN	F	30	L		1	SE-NW	Coffin?	Crouched (R), bound hands and feet?	I	?		F	Trefoil brooch, 2 oval brooches, glass bead, amber bead, iron frag., key + padlock (behind head), 4 beads (?). IN fill: knife, 2 glass beads	Paired_UO	1
UO (VK280)	M	30	NL		1	SE-NW		Supine	I	Lower arm/hip region		N	Belt buckle, part of sheep	Paired_UN Paired_deposit_KO	1

WG_ lower	F	50	L	W-E	Supine, R hand under thigh, legs close below knees, L hand perhaps on infant	I	With infant laid on her belly	N	Simultaneous_ upper	1
WG_ upper		Infant			Head on WG_ lower's L hip region	I	On belly of WG_lower	N	Simultaneous_ lower	1
XJ	F	25	NL	1 WNW-ESE	Supine, R hand under thigh	I	On inner side of R knee, tip towards body	F	4 beads (silver, glass, crystal). In fill: bead	Probably simultaneous 1

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11. The Spaces in between: Exploring the Interpretative Potential of Ungendered Graves

Introducing Viking Age Graves and the Gender Gap

The importance of mortuary material in archaeological interpretations of Viking Age social order can hardly be overstated. The period is known for its multitude of graves, often richly furnished and visibly marked in the landscape. Extensive excavations over the past 150 years, from early, large-scale projects such as at the Viking Age towns Birka and Kaupang and on to developer-led initiatives in more recent years, have given a varied and accessible corpus for further studies.¹ As a result, overarching views of dilemmas in mortuary research relating to the Viking Age will necessarily involve a level of generalization: the fundamental role of this material in interpretations of the period means it features consistently in a variety of approaches throughout research history. Recent years have seen for instance a focus on aspects of ritual performance and the scenography of burial rituals,² as well as specialized studies of particular recurring phenomena such as multiple burials,³ or human/animal relations.⁴ Studies of particular object types and their wider

social significance,⁵ together with overviews of Viking burial practice in the expansion zones,⁶ also contribute insights into a varied and widespread burial tradition. Pan-regional overviews of specific forms of burials such as boat burials or the larger ship graves,⁷ along with in-depth studies of diet, mobility, and sexed bodies,⁸ have further nuanced our overall understanding of lives and identities in the Viking Age.

Within mortuary archaeology, gender features as a key category on several levels. Firstly, it constitutes a basic analytical unit in studies that assume gender roles are largely static and known, where grave-goods are often used to support interpretations of a strictly delineated society with gendered divisions of labour, domains, and social significance.⁹ Herein, traditional associations of jewellery and textile-working tools with women, and weapons with men are often highlighted as significant. Secondly, gender is a key interest amongst many who seek to argue for a different version of the Viking Age through feminist readings of the material, wherein the roles of women are interpreted as more complex, variable, and of higher social value than within the more traditional approaches.¹⁰ These studies also

¹ For Birka and Kaupang see e.g., Gräslund 1980; Nicolaysen 1868; Blindheim and Heyerdahl-Larsen 1995. More recent excavations, see e.g., Gjerpe 2005; Glørstad 2016; Mjærsum and Rødsrud 2020. For research on mortuary material, see e.g., Dommasnes 1982; Skre 1997; Gräslund 2001; Price 2002; McGuire 2009; Nordeide 2010; Harrison 2015; Nordstein 2020; Cannell 2021.

² Price 2010; 2012; 2014.

³ Ratican 2020.

⁴ Jennbert 2006; Mansrud 2006.

⁵ Aanestad 2011; Pettersen 2020; Berg 2021.

⁶ Harrison and Floinn 2014.

⁷ Aanestad and Glørstad 2017; Bill 2019.

⁸ Naumann and others 2014; Hedenstierna-Jonson 2015; Hedenstierna-Jonson and others 2017.

⁹ For some examples, see Christiansen 2002; Solberg 2003; Callmer 2008.

¹⁰ See e.g., Løkka 2014.

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often rely on burial evidence, though highlighting instead the wealth and prominence of female graves in the overall corpus.¹¹ Thirdly, it also provides a pivotal point for those who seek to study past social roles as more fluid, contextual, and different from a blueprint of recent-historical models.¹² However, across these varied approaches there remains a largely unexplored dimension in the form of the graves that cannot be assigned male or female status: the *ungendered* graves.¹³ These often constitute a significant percentage at known cemeteries, yet are not included in hierarchies of gendered lives in most interpretations. In this paper, I seek to contextualize the ungendered graves by viewing them as expressions of intersectional identities, where gender may not play the determining part. This goes against encoded Eurocentric value systems of knowledge construction, and thereby offers a novel angle of seeking past identities that plays both against and alongside gender-diagnostic objects and their interpretations.

A note on the text is the question of terminology: most of the known terms pertaining to such graves entail certain value judgements or implies pre-prescribed meanings within culturally coded language. *Gender neutral* implies a conscious communication of neutrality, which I find elevates the known gender-diagnostic items to unassailable determinants of complete identities, when they may instead better be seen as communicating one aspect thereof. The term becomes somewhat misleading in this context, with a risk of glossing over the complexity of identity markers in burial assemblages. *Indeterminate* meanwhile, is a terminology I have employed elsewhere,¹⁴ though it contains a certain implied meaning that these graves are not gendered only because they are missing something, which in turn acts to justify their exclusion from interpretations of social roles. The term's connotations of something that cannot be fully seen and therefore not determined, makes it problematic in the context of this paper. *Tertiary* is another term that is sometimes used, but which I avoid due to its connotations of lesser value, placing these graves below male and female in archaeological interpretations in terms of their informational value. *Ungendered* is the most commonly used term, and has many of the same issues as *Indeterminate*. I have nevertheless opted to use this on the basis that it directly addresses established research traditions and that it acknowledges that these graves remain ungendered according to traditional archaeological determinants.

Background: The Impact of Binary Restrictions in Interpretations of Burial Material

The tendency to reconstruct past identities from mortuary material applies across the discipline.¹⁵ What people are buried with, how they are buried, and where, forms the core of how their identities are hypothesized and their social frameworks envisaged.¹⁶ Current archaeological knowledge production makes room for important debates on what grave-goods can really tell us (e.g., whether they belonged to the dead, were idealized representations of fixed identities, or represented the mourners more than the dead).¹⁷ Notwithstanding these debates however, the consequence afforded mortuary material within archaeological interpretations remains high.

The association of men with weapons and women with jewellery and textile-working tools are firmly established categories within Viking Age mortuary studies.¹⁸ This — slightly stereotyped — overarching association is usually argued to be supported by the archaeological material,¹⁹ as well as written sources and it is deeply embedded in the discipline.²⁰ The established view of gender in the Viking Age is largely that it was binary, with a division of male and female roles and spheres. Though this view is increasingly challenged,²¹ the idea that men and women fulfilled strictly segregated, albeit complementary, roles in the Viking Age remains entrenched.²² Thus, women are envisaged as being in charge of work inside the home, whilst men are in charge of the wider world outside.²³ This echoes recent and near-historical ideologies of keeping women within the domestic sphere,²⁴ simultaneously limiting their sphere of action and allowing men to inhabit roles seen as significant in a Eurocentric worldview which emphasizes public office as socially significant over functions of care, for instance.

However, the above model of public men and private women is a highly selective reading of the material, ignoring several key aspects of many assemblages.

11 Pedersen 2008; Moen 2011; Dommasnes and Hommedal 2016; Aannestad and Glørstad 2017.

12 Arwill-Nordbladh 1998; Back Danielsson 2007; Moen 2021; Croix (this volume).

13 Though see Back Danielsson 2007; Harrison 2015, 315.

14 Moen 2019.

15 Fowler 2013; Robb 2013; Tarlow and Stutz 2013; Giles and Williams 2016; Williams and Giles 2016; Brück 2019.

16 Williams and Sayer 2009; Tarlow and Stutz 2013; Harrison 2015; Arnold 2016; Williams and Giles 2016; Moen 2019; Price 2019.

17 Härke 1997; Williams and Sayer 2009; Härke 2014.

18 Hjørungdal 1991; Kristoffersen 1999; Solberg 2003; Ballard 2007; Back Danielsson 2007, 60; Stylegar 2010; Arnold 2016; Nordstein 2020.

19 Stylegar 2010; Croix 2012; Moen 2019.

20 Back Danielsson 2007, 50.

21 Back Danielsson 2007; Hedeager 2011; Moen 2019.

22 Solberg 2003; Price and Brink 2008; Sigurðsson 2010; Jesch 2015.

23 Sigurðsson 2008, 2010.

24 Arwill-Nordbladh 1998.

Firstly, many male and female gendered graves contain a considerable number of other forms of objects, such as tools, serving- and kitchen equipment, and domestic animals, which are shared between the assumed genders.²⁵ This means, in effect, that gender-diagnostic objects are but part of a larger and composite body of material, and yet they are consistently given prime place in conjectured identities over other, shared object categories. And secondly and approaching the heart of this chapter's argument, a considerable number of burials are not assigned a gender at all,²⁶ and therefore do not fall into either the male or the female sphere in interpretative constructions of Viking Age social order. These graves are usually assumed to be 'missing' their gender-diagnostic objects, rather than treated as a potential source of information in and of themselves.

The interpretative challenges posed by ungendered graves require attention, as they undermine and impact the current state of knowledge on many levels. Starting with the obvious, their presence arguably demonstrates that gendered identities in the Viking Age are more complex than a simple division by swords and brooches. Furthermore, ungendered graves are rarely explored in terms of what they might mean for how we envisage Viking Age values and social order, nor do they make their way into the general discourse on identities and social status. They do not feature actively in most interpretations of gender in the Viking Age, implicitly creating the assumption that the absence of gendered artefacts makes them lacking in a valid social identity. I propose however, that their perceived 'lack' of diagnostic gendered artefacts may not represent an omission at all, but rather different identity constellations or overarching concerns. A secondary challenge is that in many cases poor preservation of skeletal material, or older excavation records where skeletal material was not preserved, means that we very often have no means of comparing the bodies of the dead with the objects with which they are buried. This leads to a rather circular reasoning wherein graves are gendered via material objects, and at the same time, gendered graves are used to support stereotyped associations of certain object types with fixed genders. Put bluntly, it is hardly surprising that swords are only found with male graves in Norway, if graves are in fact determined as male on the presence of swords. Crucially, this interpretative discrepancy is rarely acknowledged. Instead, the practice of assigning gender on the basis of archaeological objects is defended on the background of there being sufficient control data of graves containing both skeletal remains and grave-goods. This however

is another partial truth at best, as the control data is far from conclusive or without complications.²⁷ Prime amongst these, is the fact that though gendered objects do correlate with sexed bodies in most cases where both exist, these only occur in a limited selection of graves: many contain sexed bodies with no diagnostic grave-goods. Indeed, this highlights that sexed skeletal remains do not negate a potential lack of diagnostic gendered artefacts in many graves. Even if we could determine the physical body in question, this would not necessarily help us access how their social persona was constructed dependent or independent of gender. In other words, the mortuary material shows that bodies do not equate with fixed and universal gendered expressions of material goods. Indeed, this opens the question of whether bodies necessarily equate to gendered lives, and whether we have in fact tended to attribute too much importance to bodies as social differentiators. From this, I argue there is a need to confront a rather unsatisfactory model of identities in the Viking Age, where people are largely expected to conform to strictly gendered lines of either male (with weapons) and female (with jewellery and textile-making tools), yet where the material quite clearly shows this is an unjustifiable simplification. The below outlines some examples of cemeteries where ungendered graves constitute a considerable proportion of the material, and raises questions about how best to understand them.

Archaeological Examples

The material chosen for discussion here is grounded in the Vestfold region in Norway and reflects concerns that extend beyond spatial and temporal limits. Though no claims are made for a comprehensive overview, the trends discernible here can be predicted for other regions as well.²⁸

Gulli

Excavated in 2003–2004, the cemetery at Gulli contained twenty relatively well-preserved burials, all dated to the Viking Age.²⁹ As it was located on arable land, all traces of external markers had been removed due to agricultural activities. However, the presence of barrows has been conjectured due to remnants of ring ditches around several of the graves. There are also burials that appear

²⁵ See discussion in Moen 2019.

²⁶ As discussed in Harrison and Floinn 2014.

²⁷ Back Danielsson 2007, 61–62; Moen 2021.

²⁸ As reflected in other regions of Viking Age Scandinavia as well as beyond chronological and spatial divides, see Svanberg 2003; Buckberry and Cherryson 2010; Pope and Ralston 2012.

²⁹ Gjerpe 2005.

Table 11.1. Overview of the graves at Gulli (source: Gjerpe 2005) (* grave 1006 can be gendered male based on the presence of a spearhead, but the presence of burned human bone from a female means the grave can be read in several ways).

Burial name	External shape	Internal markers	Gendered	Date AD
S1252	Flat grave	Uncertain	Ungendered	Viking Age
S1030	Barrow	Boat	Ungendered	Viking Age
S1006	Barrow	Horse	Ungendered/possibly male*	900–1000
S1147	Barrow	Horse	Ungendered	900–1025
S462	Flat grave	Coffin	Ungendered	Iron Age
S1502	Barrow	Boat	Ungendered	Viking Age
S1033	Barrow	Boat	Male	875–925
S1048	Barrow	Boat	Male	850–925
S1199	Barrow	Boat	Male	850–900
S1231	Barrow	Boat	Male	Viking Age
S376	Flat grave	Boat	Male	700–800
S400	Barrow	Horse	Male	900–950
S1036	Barrow	Chamber	Male	Viking Age
S393	Flat grave	Boat	Female	850–950
S395	Flat grave	Coffin	Female	850–900
S1025	Barrow	Chamber	Female	850–900
S1039	Barrow	Chamber	Female	800–900
S1044	Flat grave	Coffin	Female	775–850
S1061	Barrow	Coffin	Female	800–850
S1594	Barrow	Horse	Female	900–1050

to have been flat graves, inferred from their proximity to barrows and their lack of ring ditches. The cemetery shows signs of having a road run through it, and it is generally accessible in the landscape. The presence of several boat graves is interesting in light of the lack of any sizeable bodies of water nearby: the symbolism of these has tended to be tied to social status that activated symbols of travel to communicate their standing.³⁰ The graves are relatively well furnished, with considerable variation in grave type throughout the cemetery's life span (as below, in Table 11.1).

For the purposes of this discussion, Gulli stands out as relevant due to its high number of ungendered graves. Out of twenty graves found, six of them cannot clearly be assigned male or female gender. All the graves are gendered based on objects, as the skeletal preservation was not such as to allow osteological assessment. Moreover, these graves do not appear to be consistently poor or necessarily less well equipped than gendered counterparts. The visibility of barrows in the landscape, for instance, has often fostered interpretations of them signalling social significance:³¹ at Gulli, ungendered, male, and female graves are all found in barrows. Similarly, boat graves are often tied to high status, and here they house ungendered, male, and female graves.

Furthermore, several of the ungendered burials at Gulli contain horse-related equipment, again typically interpreted as an indicator of high social status.³²

Several of the graves at Gulli show signs of having been broken into in prehistory, and an argument could be made that gender-diagnostic objects could have been lost through these processes. However, this argument is unsustainable upon closer examination: the majority of graves that show evidence of having been entered still contain gender-diagnostic objects,³³ leading to a reasonable hypothesis that such items were not habitually targeted during break-ins. Indeed, it could rather be argued that it was the wealthier of the graves that were targeted for subsequent break-ins. Grave S1030 is a case in point of how ungendered graves at Gulli ought not to be read as though they are necessarily missing something: a boat grave found under a barrow and containing a variety of material objects including carpentry tools, a harness buckle, a sickle, and several hones as well as remains of a chest,³⁴ this bears the hallmarks of a well-furnished grave. Its location in the cemetery layout was central, indicating a position of some importance.³⁵ Another

³⁰ Samdal 2005; Gjerpe 2007.

³¹ Zachrisson 1994; Skre 1997.

³² Gjerpe 2005; Gjerpe and Hansen 2011.

³³ Gjerpe 2005, 142–46.

³⁴ Gjerpe 2005, 54–60.

³⁵ Moen 2019, 196–98.

ungendered burial, S1147, contains horse remains and a rattle amongst other things, objects often associated with high status.³⁶ S1502 is another boat grave under a barrow, leaving room to speculate that it signalled high status, though it is less well furnished than many others. Overall, the ungendered graves seem to mark status in much the same ways as gendered ones do, albeit without weapons, textile tools, or diagnostic brooches. When presented in this way, it can be argued that this 'lack' of gender diagnostic objects is ascribable to the expectations of modern archaeologists, rather than any apparent poverty in the archaeological material itself. The high number of ungendered graves at this site raises questions of the relevance of gendered objects to all forms of social status, as it can reasonably be argued that Gulli represents a high-status burial ground.³⁷

Nes by Numedalslågen

Another cemetery of interest in this context is Nes, by the River Numedalslågen that runs through Vestfold. Nes is placed by a bend in the river, and forms a sizeable cemetery of fifty-two mounds, excavated in the nineteenth century.³⁸ Thirty-one mounds can be dated to the Viking Age, with thirteen of these categorized as ungendered. Furthermore, although that leaves eighteen graves that are categorized as either male or female, the find categories are quite similar across gendered divides, with typical grave-goods including strap buckles, horse remains, tools such as knives and hones, and mounts for chests and harnesses all featuring across perceived gender categories.³⁹ All the excavated graves here are from barrows. One example of a potentially high-status ungendered grave is the only boat grave recorded at the site, Nicolaysen's barrow 27,⁴⁰ which contains equipment that indicates involvement in trade. Another ungendered grave (Nicolaysen's barrow 29) contained horse bone along with silver-plated mounts,⁴¹ again speaking to material wealth typically found independent of gender.

Most of the ungendered graves at Nes do not reflect the highest levels of wealth, but they are by and large comparable to the gendered male and female burials surrounding them. Indeed, there is little to indicate that they ought to be considered as lacking in anything. Instead, they contain similar objects to the gendered graves across the site, and it would not be tenable to discuss the social identities signalled at Nes without giving due consideration to the ungendered graves. Their

presence suggests identities that may exist alongside those conjectured as belonging to gender-diagnostic objects, yet from their inclusion at this site it seems these identities were not necessarily less socially visible. As with Gulli above, the ungendered graves ought not be deemed irrelevant in the interpretation of the intersection of gender with social status, and a reasonable conjecture is that high social status meriting furnished burial under a mound need not include the insignia associated with female/male burials by modern archaeologists. Once again, this opens the question of whether or not we are gendering graves on too narrow a selection of criteria, or whether gender is always relevant in the construction of social status.

Kaupang

At the Viking Age town of Kaupang the impression is slightly less clear, with several of the graves termed ungendered falling amongst those with less contents overall. However, this is not universal, and the presence of more than half of these graves under barrows does lead to the supposition that the lack of signalled recognizable gender is perhaps due to choice rather than a lack of means.⁴² Using the cemetery known as Nordre Kaupang as an example, Figure 11.1 shows the distribution of excavated and gender-assigned graves, with ungendered burials present in comparable numbers and locations to male and female gendered ones:

At the flat grave cemetery known as Bikjholberget, also associated with the town at Kaupang, there are examples of wealthy ungendered graves such as the burial known as K/XIV,⁴³ which contained beads, a needle, a soapstone fishing sinker, and a soapstone vessel amongst other things. Bikjholberget however does not have a great many graves that fall into ungendered categories, lending strength to the supposition that the roles expressed by gender-diagnostic objects were communicated routinely in these graves. This creates a potentially interesting discrepancy between the flat graves at Bikjholberget and the barrows at Nordre Kaupang. A potential interpretation worth contemplating is whether or not barrows spoke of social status *independent* of gender, whereas the flat graves at Bikjholberget seem more invested in communicating individual significance, where material wealth including gender markers was more important. The mounds of Nordre Kaupang speak of a preoccupation with visibility,⁴⁴ and perhaps we might surmise that it was the outward symbolism that mattered more in this case than what was inside the graves themselves.

³⁶ Forseth 1993.

³⁷ Gjerpe 2007; 2011.

³⁸ Nicolaysen 1886.

³⁹ Nicolaysen 1886; Moen 2019, 183–85.

⁴⁰ Nicolaysen 1887, 29.

⁴¹ Nicolaysen 1886, 33–34.

⁴² Nicolaysen 1868; Stylegar 2007.

⁴³ Blindheim and Heyerdahl-Larsen 1995, 42.

⁴⁴ Skre 2007.

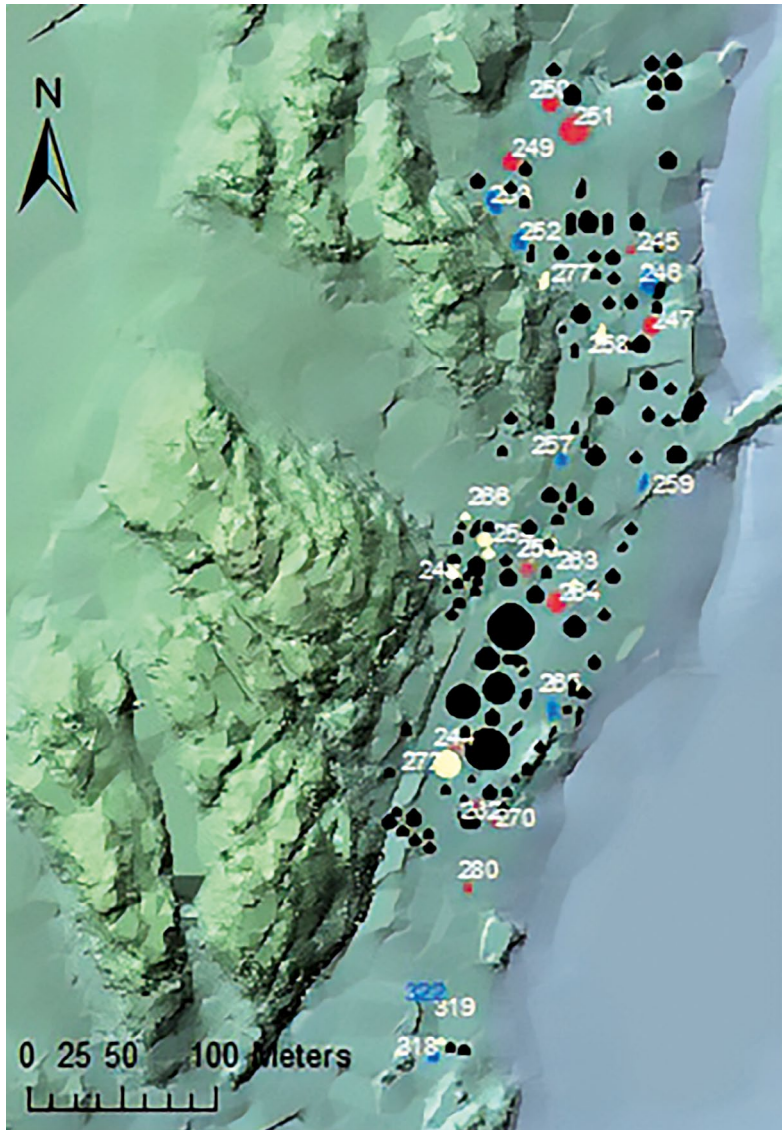


Figure 11.1. Map of Nordre Kaupang cemetery. Male graves are marked red, female are blue, and ungendered are light yellow, whilst the black ones were recorded at excavation as not containing any objects or were unexcavated. Map by author.

Overall Material Impressions

Ungendered graves are not just symptomatic of Vestfold, or of Norway. Sarah Croix's work on Danish graves (this volume) demonstrates that this is a concern across other regions of Scandinavia, and Stephen Harrison has highlighted the same in the western expansion zones.⁴⁵ A brief look at, e.g., Haakon Shetelig's classic overview of graves on the western coast of Norway, shows that at least 11 per cent of

graves are not assigned male or female identity, and most likely that number could be higher if re-examined with a critical eye.⁴⁶ Northern Norway also contains a considerable number of ungendered graves,⁴⁷ as do other parts of eastern Norway.⁴⁸ The imperative question here becomes whose identities it is we are truly seeing in the past, if the material we use does not in fact reflect the clearly gendered divisions that we choose to forefront?

Before moving on to a discussion, however, there are two main interpretative objections that deserve acknowledgement. The first is that we, that is the archaeologists, may experience these graves as ungendered due to a lack of preservation of gendered markers such as clothing, hair, or other organic materials. Today's available archaeological methods give us little opportunity to test this, and so we are left with inorganic material such as metal and stone, with little or no opportunity to know what else might have been contained in the graves. One could here cite Oseberg with its vast wealth of organic material and relative lack of metal, and ask questions about how representative the material we work with from the Viking Age really is, if we can assume that this indicates a custom of interring organic materials in graves. However, this is not only a consideration that ought to apply to ungendered graves, as it would surely alter the picture of graves that do contain sexed metal artefacts as well. Moreover, archaeology is a discipline that relies on filling in the gaps with reasonable interpretation: we cannot create these by looking at what *might* have been present in graves, we can only work with what we do have. And indeed, as far as Oseberg is concerned, the vast wealth of wooden objects found in the grave are in the main not gender diagnostic, being comparable to the objects found in the nearby (male gendered) Gokstad ship mound.⁴⁹ The second objection, is that ungendered graves, assuming that the preserved materials are representative of social status, may reflect a less wealthy segment of society: those who could not afford to leave valuable brooches and swords in the ground. Yet, as we have seen above, many of these graves show clear signs of wealth, and it does not appear to be a defensible interpretation to rank them as ungendered because of a lack of disposable wealth. Instead, I propose they ought to be considered alongside gendered counterparts, as communicating social status in their own right.

⁴⁶ Shetelig 1912, 176–77.

⁴⁷ Sjøvold 1974.

⁴⁸ Forseth 1993.

⁴⁹ Pedersen 2008.

⁴⁵ See Harrison 2015, 315 with references.

Discussion: Dissolving a Restrictive Discursive Practice

The entanglement of recent-historical ideas of binary gender with the ways in which we see the past is a far-reaching topic.⁵⁰ As we have seen, interpretations of Viking Age social order favour a binary constellation of men and women, assigned different material indicators and seen as inhabiting different social spheres. At first glance, the mortuary record does indicate support of this, with textile tools and oval brooches only rarely occurring together with weapons, for instance. But if we are to condone interpreting social identities from the mortuary record, then room must be made for the ungendered graves too.⁵¹ Their exclusion from subsequent interpretations relies on an interpretative neglect that rests in part on modern ingrained beliefs in gender as an integral part of identity, and by extension of binary gender as the building block around which identities are centred. In Eurocentric cultures, a person's gender is amongst the first things with which they are identified, placed in front of date of birth or even name when completing forms, whether boarding passes for travel, purchasing forms, job applications, or registrations for conferences. In large parts of the world, when expecting a child, parents are likely to find out the sex of their baby as soon as they are able to, and to communicate this as a key part of the projected identity of their progeny. From before birth, perceived sex shapes and constructs the expected identity and life experience of a person.⁵² This is an ingrained and accepted cultural practice, enforced by social norms and rules. Notwithstanding the ways in which this is changing, with recent openness to non-binary identities and increased awareness of how identities are constructed and maintained,⁵³ the established and dominant Eurocentric worldview still largely assumes people to be *either* male or female and that this subsequently shapes their characteristics, preferences, and abilities. This also applies when we confront the past. We classify graves as male or female, because that is how our own identities are constructed.⁵⁴ When graves do not allow this simple division, we place them into a third category, defined by the things that we perceive them to be lacking, and they are left on the margins.

Archaeology, by the very nature of the discipline, confronts partial material remains of past lives, and so there must be room for that unequal preservation

or other processes may have caused the discrepancies we see in communicated identities. As was mentioned above, there are several reasonable explanations for the lack of gender-diagnostic objects in graves aside from the one I favour. And yet, the number of ungendered graves, their prevalence alongside gendered ones, their similarity in the furnishings which they do contain, lead me to propose that they in fact communicate an identity where gender — at least as communicated by weapons and brooches — is consciously not foregrounded. Moreover, it is not standard archaeological practice to categorize contexts according to what we think they lack. Hence, whether or not they signal gender in other ways is not necessarily important. Instead, I argue that even if they do, their identity does not coincide with the stereotyped male or female projected ideals that separate men and women into segregated and bounded categories. This serves to illustrate that the constraints imposed on archaeological interpretation by recent historical ideals that have shaped how we view the nature of 'male' and 'female' needs addressing as a limiting, and even harmful (in the sense of production of viable knowledge that reflects the archaeological material) practice.⁵⁵ Hence, whatever gendered identity they do or do not communicate, needs to come *in addition* to accepted interpretative norms, with the result that the way in which we understand and represent gender in the Viking Age requires quite some fine-tuning from the current state of knowledge.

As to what these graves can be seen to communicate, we have seen above that they are often found in barrows, boat graves, and even chamber graves: all of which are habitually accepted as markers of social status. Furthermore, they often contain grave-goods indicative of domestic status, such as cooking equipment, mounts for chests, or domestic animals. They can also contain trading equipment, fishing equipment, and woodworking equipment, indicating specialized roles. All of these categories are also found in gendered graves. A logical supposition, therefore, may be that these things indicate pursuits and responsibilities that could bring high status, independent of social status as signalled through swords and brooches. Furthermore, this leaves room to query whether or not the items we treat as gender diagnostic are instead better understood as indicators of particular social roles rather than being indicative of binary gender. Considering that gender is but one aspect of how social identities are constructed, it may be fruitful to question whether or not other aspects outweigh gender in these graves. Perhaps age — either young or old — may mean that gender is less relevant, for instance outside of childbearing years or in certain

⁵⁰ See e.g., Back Danielsson 2007, 50–87.

⁵¹ Harrison and Floinn 2014.

⁵² Rippon 2019.

⁵³ e.g., Bufdir 2022.

⁵⁴ Back Danielsson 2007; Back Danielsson and Thedéen 2012.

⁵⁵ As discussed in Back Danielsson 2007, 50.

phases of life. Occupation may also play a part: if we accept certain 'gender' markers as indicating status as much as gender, we can suggest that these may be people who were for instance not heads of household or families and therefore did not need to signal their roles through oval brooches or weapons, for instance. We may furthermore factor in belonging: it may be that these graves belonged to people who had joined the community later in life, and who therefore did not wear the same symbols of identity. The possibilities go on from here, and only further systematic study can result in more solid answers. What is already clear, however, is that dividing the Viking Age neatly into men carrying weapons and women wearing brooches is an unjustifiable simplification of a much more complex material record.

Conclusion

This brief paper has but scratched the surface of a vast body of material that deserves ongoing attention and

discussion in order to rectify its historical neglect. Ungendered graves, when placed in the context of graves that are understood as male or female, have the potential not only to bring new aspects of identities into play, but also to nuance our understandings of those identities. Indeed, the inclusion of ungendered graves in discussions of past identities can help shed light on the ongoing restricting influence that modern and recent-historical normative gender models still hold over our interpretative frameworks. Detaching our views of the past from binary expectations of gendered identities can only be fruitful. As ever, it pays to remember that the questions we ask determine the answers we get. In other words, the less leading those questions are, the less predictably like ourselves the past may become. I will end this paper with the suggestion that when confronted with burial material from the Viking Age, instead of asking 'does this grave contain a man or a woman?', we could ask 'what sort of a person(s) is it we find in this grave?'. The answers we might get have the potential to change our understanding of how a social person could and should be constructed.

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The Nordic Middle Ages and Beyond

12. Textiles and Texts: Gendering the Medieval Church

While flexibility is discernible in gender roles in most societies, both past and present, it is generally accepted that the making of manuscripts in the Nordic region during the Middle Ages (AD 1050–1537) was dominated by men whilst the making of textiles was dominated by women. Both manuscripts and textiles, however, are texts in the deepest meaning of the word, and both are specific categories of artefact. Not only does textile design or its artwork present literal reality; texts are analogues to spun and woven fabric. As Barthes pointed out in *The Death of the Author*, the meaning behind both texts and textiles is dependent on the observer, rather than the composer.¹ Nevertheless, as will be discussed here, the textile work of women has ended up in the shadow of manuscripts and thus been regarded as subaltern to the male-dominated realm of medieval text production. This chapter will examine why, how, and when this happened, demonstrating the tension between how people in the Middle Ages valued textiles, versus how they have been valued in later times. At the same time, an attempt will be made to dismantle the prevailing view on medieval textiles by breaking their silence and affording them the inclusion they deserve in academic and popular presentations. Examples will be taken from male and female monasteries operating in Iceland, characterized by the production of text and textile respectively. This discussion also intends to leave behind the subordinate position of medieval nuns

within the narrow framework of ‘standard’ monastic forms, which are in research commonly defined on premises set by patterns present in male monasteries.

Monastic Houses in Iceland

Fourteen monastic houses were in existence for shorter or longer periods in Iceland during the Middle Ages (Fig. 12.1), two for women and the other twelve for men. Five of these monastic houses, all male, were short-lived, but the successful ones became well-staffed with both religious and lay members who provided a broad range of social services to their local communities. The monasteries also became wealthy landholders, running large cattle and sheep ranches that supplied them with food and raw material for manufacturing manuscripts and textiles. Moreover, most of them provided the healthy and rich with a comfortable life as corrodians or lay workers, besides training the future canons and those who wanted to become religious members of the monastic communities. Well-to-do people — of all ages and genders — could likewise obtain education, either theoretical or vocational, in the monastic houses, or purchase textiles, manuscripts, and other products from them.² In fact, the majority of the Icelandic medieval manuscripts that are preserved today were made and written by monks in the male houses, and likewise many of the preserved ecclesiastical cloths were made by nuns in the female houses.

¹ Barthes 1977, 16–20, 155–64. See also Hyer 2019, 84–85, and even Stutza and Abrudan Caciara 2017, 98: “‘Text’ relates to ‘texture’ and ‘textile’ and traces back to ‘texo’ — ‘to weave’, referring to the way words and sentences are ‘woven’ together. We speak of ‘weaving’ a tale or ‘spinning a yarn.’ A ‘subtle’ idea is a ‘finely spun’ one.”

² Kristjánsdóttir 2023.

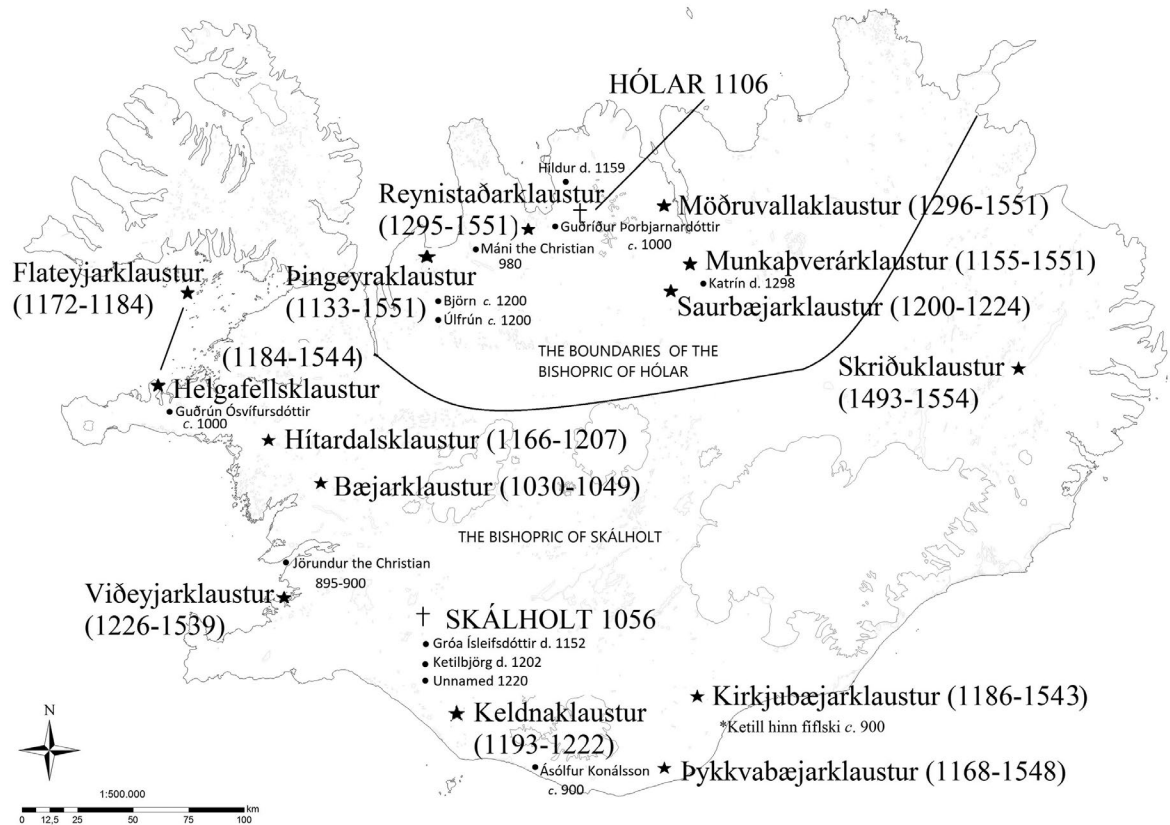


Figure 12.1. The monastic houses run in Iceland during medieval times. Map by author.

Creating a Bias

A considerable number of Icelandic medieval manuscripts have survived until present times but unfortunately, relatively fewer textiles. Icelanders started to collect the medieval manuscripts less than a century after the dissolutions of the monastic houses in the mid-sixteenth century, at a time when Protestantism and later even nationalism was highly influential in north European research and politics. Initially, the collection was done in the spirit of Danish Renaissance men, such as Ole Worm (1588–1654) who, in line with other early antiquarians, was mainly interested in literature written in Old Norse, including runic inscriptions, rather than Latin. One of those who followed in the footsteps of these earliest royal collectors was the Icelander Árni Magnússon (1663–1730), who managed to collect the largest number of manuscripts ever gathered in Iceland. In total, he collected nearly two thousand complete and partial books, besides a considerable number of official letters, inventories, testaments, etc., later published by several scholars under the title *Diplomatarium islandicum*.³ Next to systematically collect manuscripts

was the leader of the Icelandic independence movement, Jón Sigurðsson (1811–1879).⁴ Neither Magnússon nor Sigurðsson, however, appears to have been particularly interested in medieval textiles. Conversely, some of the most precious cloths preserved from medieval Iceland are those that were sold abroad in the early nineteenth century when interest in antiquities rose sharply. A number of wealthy tourists visiting the island at that time sought out Icelandic manuscripts for purchase as well as other antiquities, including textiles.⁵ Thus, to date, there has never been any large-scale movement to collect textiles in Iceland, as there was for manuscripts.

This brief history of the collection of antiquities may have set the tone for the coming attitude against textiles. As a matter of fact, textiles appear to have been somewhat neglected not only by post-Reformation antiquity collectors: twentieth- and twenty-first-century scholars seem to have paid strictly limited attention to textiles, despite the fact that textiles portray stories in artwork and words just as manuscripts, rune stones,

3 Jónsson 1998; Jensson 2017, 880; 2021.

4 Ólafsson 2022. *Diplomatarium islandicum*, will hereafter be referred to as DI. DI contains sixteen volumes.

5 Wandel 1952, 52–53; Guðjónsson 1962, 132–34; Ólafsson 2022.

and carvings in wood do. Actually, it is easy to get the impression, even from recent scholarship, that textile work is an occupation of secondary value and importance, while manuscript making has been classified as a highly valuable, professional pursuit. The textiles, of their vast kind, often serve in publications as decorations rather than meaningful sources.⁶ This is despite the fact that textiles have been one of the main necessities in human life throughout the ages, in the form of clothing, cloth, bedding, sails, containers, interiors, and tapestries, etc., embroidered or not embroidered. Moreover, embroidered chasubles, gowns, antependia, and tapestries, for instance, were no less lucrative than manuscripts during medieval times, and both categories were based on specialized skill and academic knowledge. Most importantly, however, both textiles and texts are man-made objects of consumption.⁷

The absence of textiles in historical metanarratives may be explained by the circumstance that textile work has from time immemorial been dominated by women and also investigated mostly by female researchers. Historical and archaeological research was, on the other hand, until only very recently led by men who mainly studied the male-dominated realms of society — of which manuscript making is certainly a part. With the rise of feminism, and later gender studies in the twentieth century, the demand of ‘writing women into history’ became more and more vociferous resulting in revolutionary changes in the way women are approached and presented in historical studies.⁸ However, although women have become more visible in what might be called a womanless past before, the tendency has often been to find a place for women *in the world of men*.⁹ The studies have, therefore, in some cases been aimed at tracing evidence that might prove women’s involvement in the male-dominated work of writing or if textiles could fit into economic history, as will be demonstrated below. It is, therefore, easy to feel like that when objects such as textiles, fall outside the traditional scope of political or economic history, it is as if their value evaporates.

The history of textile research is thus part of women’s history in recent decades; their fight to be heard and to make past women visible. As we will see in the following sections, during the second wave of the feminist movement around the mid-twentieth century, the Icelandic medieval textiles were occasionally the subject of research but only by a few female scholars who attempted to enter the male-dominated academic

world. Furthermore, such research was never given a public voice, except when textiles featured as basic commercial goods in northern Europe. The textile production undertaken on behalf of the Icelandic female convents during the medieval period, as will be discussed here, may prove to be useful for highlighting further their overall contribution to society. Still, before proceeding, a few words on the Icelandic manuscripts and their production in the monastic houses may be helpful in shedding light on the gendered difference in studies on medieval Iceland.

The Icelandic Medieval Manuscripts

Medieval Icelandic literature has been — and still is — widely studied. Its importance for Nordic history and heritage is undeniable. Since the early eighteenth century, the manuscripts have been stored in Denmark, but some of them have occasionally been returned to Iceland in the context of central events for the nation, such as in 1944 when the country became an independent republic. Moreover, the medieval manuscripts were placed on the UNESCO world heritage list in 2009, further underlining their significance. One of the most precious medieval manuscripts, Flateyjarbók, Codex Flateyensis, was for example brought back from Copenhagen to Iceland in 1971 as one of Iceland’s main national treasures. Flateyjarbók is the largest of all medieval Icelandic manuscripts, comprising 225 written and illustrated parchment leaves, in total 450 pages, made of the skins of 113 calves.¹⁰ The making of Flateyjarbók began in 1387, according to what is stated in it, but it was most likely made in the male Benedictine house, Þingeyraklaustur.¹¹

In fact, the monastic houses, particularly the Benedictine ones, needed to have their own libraries for their work. They had to produce books for their personal use as well as for use in nearby churches.¹² Furthermore, as can be observed from the literary work taking place in Þingeyraklaustur monastery, for example, the monks there also wrote and produced books for kings and chieftains upon request. This may have been the case when Flateyjarbók was made in the fourteenth century, and even *Sverris saga* (The Saga of Sverrir, the king of Norway, r. 1177–1202) authored around 1200 by Abbot Karl Jónsson of Þingeyraklaustur. Moreover, the *vita* of King Ólafur Tryggvason of Norway (r. 995–1000) was written by Brother Oddur Snorrason, also in Þingeyraklaustur, in thirteenth century. Brother

6 See for example, Karlsson 2000.

7 Barthes 1977, 161; Labarge 1999, 77–96; Bildhauer 2020, 74–78.

8 Lerner 1975; Gilchrist 1994, 2–9; Moen 2019.

9 See, for example, Engelstad 2007.

10 Nordal 1971, 1–2.

11 Jónsson 2021, 151.

12 Kristjánisdóttir 2016, 229–30; Clark 2011, 91–102.

Snorrason is also known for having written *Yngvars saga víðförla* (The Saga of Yngvar the Far-traveller) in Latin. Nineteen original manuscripts from Þingeyraklaustur are preserved today but many more are known to be lost. The monastery itself also appears to have had a relatively large library by Icelandic standards. It possessed at least thirty-seven books in Latin and thirteen in Old Norse, though certain types of books are said to be 'numerous', meaning there could have been up to one hundred books in total.¹³

Þingeyraklaustur was certainly not the only monastery in Iceland that possessed a large library. According to inventories made on the other Icelandic monastic houses, male and female, they owned quite large collections of hagiographies, *vitae*, psalm books, Bibles, and secular stories. The male Augustinian house Helgafellsklaustur had the largest library of all the monastic libraries in medieval Iceland. In 1184 it contained approximately 120 books, but by 1397 the library had enlarged considerably and contained about 200 books.¹⁴ The female Benedictine house, Kirkjubæjarklaustur, owned fifty-one books in 1397, written in both Latin and Old Norse.¹⁵ The most precious was Kirkjubæjarbók, that survives today, and was made around 1500. It contains hagiographies, poets and poetic accounts of ten female saints and is decorated with numerous coloured illustrations. Kirkjubæjarbók is commonly thought to have been made by the monks in Kirkjubæjarklaustur's neighbouring monastery, the male Augustinian house Þykkvabæjarklaustur, by order.¹⁶ The other female monastery in medieval Iceland, also a Benedictine house, Reynistaðarklaustur, had thirty-seven books in their library in 1525.¹⁷ Some of them may have been from a woman, Úlfrún Ketilsdóttir, who donated her library to the female house there in 1443.¹⁸ Furthermore, preserved agreements show that both boys and girls could undertake theoretical studies at Reynistaðarklaustur, as was done in the male monastic house.¹⁹

Still, male and female monastic houses did not only need to maintain a good library. They also shared the obligation of spreading the medieval Christian ideology through prayer and devotional work on artwork, such as in ecclesiastical cloths. The knowledge of how to represent biblical events and saintly figures appeared in their production: books, textiles, carvings, iconography, statues, and so forth, but the recommended iconography used could be accessed in certain guidebooks, known as

model books or *exempla*. One of those is still preserved today, but it was made and kept in the male house Þingeyraklaustur.²⁰ The iconographical instructions in it appear to have been followed faithfully. Images from it appear in the preserved ecclesiastical textiles, particularly those that were made in the female monastery Reynistaðarklaustur.²¹

Research on Textiles in Iceland

Several precious medieval cloths from Iceland are preserved today, of which at least seven are believed to have been made in the Icelandic female convents, Kirkjubæjarklaustur and Reynistaðarklaustur. These are the tapestry from Hvammur²² and the antependia from Stafafell, Reykjahlíð, Draflastaðir, Svalbarð,²³ Grenjaðarstaður, and Skarð (Fig. 12.3).²⁴ All are embroidered with stories or images of biblical events, saints, and bishops as well as with secular motifs and stories. Five of them are kept in the National Museum of Iceland while four are on display in museums abroad.²⁵

Moreover, recent studies have shown that Iceland's archaeological record is remarkably rich in various textiles. Over five thousand fragments have been preserved from different types of sites, associated with different social strata, and dating from the settlement period during the ninth century until modern times. These fragments are under investigation,²⁶ but until recently largely lay unexamined.²⁷ Besides the ongoing analyses of the archaeological textile fragments, zoo-archaeological remains and tools used for the making of cloths — the spindle whorls, loom weights, and even traces of the looms themselves — have proven useful for studies on textile production in Iceland's past.²⁸ However, so far, most of the research done on textiles has been aimed at examining the so-called *vaðmál*, i.e., woollen broadcloth, that is usually undyed wool fabric woven in upright looms.

Vaðmál is considered to have been Iceland's main export from the eleventh to fourteenth centuries, but

13 Jensson 2021, 151–53.

14 DI I, 282; DI IV, 169–71.

15 DI IV, 238.

16 Wolf 2011, 15.

17 DI IX, 320–21.

18 DI IV, 636–37.

19 Kristjánsdóttir 2017.

20 See, for example, Kristjánsdóttir 2013.

21 Wandel 1952, 51–54.

22 Guðjónsson 1985, 9–10.

23 The antependium from Svalbarð, however, appears to be a reused piece from a wall-hanging with secular motifs, see Kristjánsdóttir and Erlendsson 2023.

24 Jónsdóttir 1965, 134–45; Guðjónsson 1962, 132–34; 1997, 85–89; 2023, 28–32.

25 See for example, Wandel 1952, 51–54; Eldjárn 1963, nos 18 and 32; Jónsdóttir 1965, 134–45; Guðjónsson 1997, 85–89.

26 See <<https://steinunn.hi.is/is/rannsoknirresearch/samspil-manns-og-natturu>> [accessed 1 December 2024].

27 Smith 2014, 731–35.

28 See Smith 2013; Øye 2016; Nødseth 2021.

after that its price diminished drastically. It was used for taxation, exchange, and gifts throughout Scandinavia and in Iceland and was also accepted as currency in Shetland and Ireland. Most commodities were in fact priced in *vaðmál* at that time in Iceland, and *vaðmál* was also made for internal consumption in Iceland until the seventeenth century, when weaving was industrialized with the introduction of horizontal looms.²⁹ Information about the measurements of *vaðmál* as a legal currency are preserved in the Icelandic medieval lawbooks and the value was based on its size measured in ells. The value of *vaðmál* did not stay the same during the time it was used as a currency, and its changing value has been used to clarify temporal changes in the making of *vaðmál*. Written documents and zoo-archaeological data have similarly been used to evaluate the scale of sheep farming in Iceland, in order to shed light on access to wool as a raw material for textile making in the country. According to medieval inventories and descriptions in the Icelandic sagas, the largest estates had flocks of two to three hundred sheep, while the smaller and mid-sized farms had sixty to eighty sheep.³⁰ The zoo-archaeological studies have also shown that 70–80 per cent of domestic animals on larger farms dating to the tenth to fifteenth centuries, were older sheep, which produce wool better suited for weaving.³¹

The studies mentioned above highlight the crucial role of women in textile making. Scholars also agree on women's overall responsibility in the production of *vaðmál* and thereby their important contribution to the economy of the North Atlantic and Scandinavian societies during the Viking Age and Middle Ages — and in fact even longer in Iceland. The women served as designers and weavers, and ensured that the legal measurements were followed.³² This pre-industrial textile production is, furthermore, usually believed to have taken place inside the households themselves and thus, in light of the scale of the production, on most farms in Iceland until industrial times.³³ It has, therefore, been rightfully stated in this context that during the medieval period, Icelandic women 'were weaving money in abundance'.³⁴ The focus in these textiles studies has in this manner almost exclusively been aimed at the commercial value of *vaðmál* in the dominant economic system that was controlled by men. There is no doubt that women played an important role in the general textile production for both individual consumption and sale, but in these studies, they are portrayed *behind*

the scenes. As a commodity and cultural remains that embrace the realities of life, textiles indisputably deserve wider historical inclusion and contextualization, like all other categories of objects and antiquities. The question is whether the emphasis in research should rather be placed on the ever-changing cultural and social meaning of the textile production, and to 'weave' women into history because they certainly did more than simply produce a commodity through their production of *vaðmál*.

Textile Making Mirroring Societal Changes

Scholars agree that there were regular shifts in textile making during the Viking and medieval periods in Iceland, as may be read from legal guidelines on the fixed value of *vaðmál*.³⁵ These changes mirror societal changes. The earliest definitions of how to rate the *vaðmál* appears in the oldest lawbook in Iceland, *Grágás*, initially recorded in the early twelfth century, but based on a collection of land laws applied during the Commonwealth period (930–1262). When *Grágás* was replaced by the lawbook *Járnsíða* in 1271, and again ten years later by *Jónsbók*, the fixed rates of *vaðmál* changed markedly again. The archaeological fragments of textiles also clearly witness changes in the technology of weaving, particularly by the end of the thirteenth century. At the same time, the demand for fish increased, most likely to fulfil the requirements of the fast, resulting in fish and *vaðmál* coming to be among Iceland's chief exports during the Middle Ages.³⁶ Nevertheless, what may be criticized in most textile studies done so far is the exclusion of the enormous growth of the medieval Church and the impact it had on textile making in general at that time. The earliest shift in textile making may be observed soon after Christianization in early eleventh century with the second shift in effect by the end of the thirteenth century, by which time the Church had gained nearly full governmental control in Iceland, control that it retained until the Reformation in the mid-sixteenth century.

In short, the governmental system, applied in Viking Age and early medieval Iceland, was based on the tradition of chieftaincy, but when the secular governance of Icelandic society was taken over by the Norwegian Crown in 1262/1264, the model of internal chieftaincy diminished considerably and gradually vanished. As a result, both the secular and the ecclesiastical governance of Iceland was transferred

29 Þorláksson 1991; Smith 2013, 21; Øye 2016, 245–50.

30 Þorláksson 1991, 270–79.

31 Øye 2016, 245–46.

32 See for example, Smith 2013, 24–27; Øye 2016, 245–50.

33 Smith 2013, 24, 38; 2014, 732.

34 Smith 2014, 738.

35 See for example, Þorláksson 1991; Smith 2013; Øye 2016.

36 Þorláksson 1991, Smith 2013, 25–26, 33–34.

from the hands of Icelanders to the Norwegian king and archbishops.³⁷ The most prominent growth of the Church in Iceland, however, came about with the resolution of the *Staðamál* shortly thereafter.³⁸ The conflicts took place between the Icelandic lay chieftains and the clergy over reforms to the Church. The central aim of these reforms was to create an administrative differentiation between royal and ecclesiastical powers, but similar conflicts arose much earlier on the Continent. As a result, wherever the conflicts occurred, they brought about a significant undercutting of imperial and lay power vis-à-vis ecclesiastical power.³⁹ The conflicts in Iceland were settled with an official alliance made at Avaldsnes in Norway in 1297, albeit after negotiations between royal and ecclesiastical authorities that had lasted since 1272. Among other results were the new lawbooks, *Járnsíða* in 1271 and *Jónsbók* in 1281. After the *Staðamál* conflicts had been settled, ecclesiastical power in Iceland increased enormously at the expense of secular chiefs, resulting in that the Church became the dominant administrative power in Iceland, retaining its position until the Reformation in the mid-sixteenth century.⁴⁰ The growth of the monastic houses, as well as the other churchly institutions in the country, around that time, was enormous and can be seen in the enlargement of church buildings, the increased number of books in monastic libraries, more elaborate furnishing of the monastic houses, the growing popularity of corrody contracts, the expansion of monasteries' livestock herds, and the rise in donations, to mention some examples.⁴¹ At the same time, there was increasing demand for ecclesiastical textiles, such as chasubles, gowns, antependia, and tapestries that were often embroidered with biblical and saintly images, but also with stories of elite persons or historical events.

Thus, the official textile production — just like the manuscript making — reflects the changes of the society involved, such as the growth of ecclesiastical powers in Iceland. This was in fact pointed out by several female scholars already in the twentieth century, that with the establishment of the bishoprics in Skálholt 1056 and Hólar in 1104 and later the two female monasteries, Kirkjubæjarklaustur in 1186 and Reynistaðarklaustur in 1295, these ecclesiastical institutions became the main centres of textile production for the medieval Church in Iceland and thereby met the growing demand for more

advanced cloths than just the *vaðmál*.⁴² Recent studies have shown, moreover, that the female Benedictine monastery in Norse Greenland may have served the same role by supplying the churches belonging to the Garðar bishopric with ecclesiastical cloths.⁴³ The grounds for the ecclesiastical cloths may often have been woven of wool or linen in common homes, while designed and embroidered by more skilled women, such as the nuns. But the wall-hangings, tapestries, canonials, and other ecclesiastical garments were most likely produced from the beginning to the end product in the female monasteries.

Sheep Farming and Textile Production in the Female Convents

Medieval inventories demonstrate clearly that the monastic houses in Iceland were engaged in intellectual work, resulting in the manufacturing of books and textiles. The houses were also, as pinpointed above, landholders and had large flocks of domestic animals. However, the religious inhabitants were not expected to carry out menial tasks, such as common farm work, which was taken care of by lay brothers and sisters, i.e., working hands who were non-religious members of the monastic communities. Indeed, the wide-ranging activities in the monastic houses demanded both appropriate lay capacity and extensive manual labour, which is in fact known to have constituted a significant part of everyday life within them.⁴⁴

It is highly noteworthy that the female house in Kirkjubæjarklaustur had a significantly larger number of sheep than any other monastic house in Iceland and the other female house in Reynistaðarklaustur had the highest number of cattle (Fig. 12.2). When the earliest inventorial inspection of Kirkjubæjarklaustur was carried out in 1218, there were 180 ewes, but thirty cows and seven bulls.⁴⁵ When the convent was inventoried again in 1343, the number of livestock there had grown considerably, especially sheep. At its home farm in Kirkjubær, there were nearly 1050 sheep (ewes and rams), besides 360 lambs, but this is the only time the number of lambs were listed in the Icelandic monastic inventories. There was also a considerable increase in the number of cattle, which by that time numbered 118 (calves, cows, and bulls).⁴⁶ The livestock held in

37 Sigurðsson 1989, 79–80; Karlsson 2000, 92–95.

38 Kristjánsdóttir 2017, 456–66; Þórhallsson 2021, 21–52.

39 Karlsson 2000, 39–40; Wood 2013, 851–64.

40 Guðmundsson 2000, 84–101; Karlsson 2000, 96–99; Sigurðsson 2006, 508–12; Stefánsson 2002, 139–66.

41 Kristjánsdóttir 2023, 33–46.

42 Jónsdóttir 1965, 134–47; Sigurðardóttir 1988, 245–52; Guðjónsson 1997, 85.

43 Kristjánsdóttir 2021, 53–64.

44 Gilchrist 1999, 86–90; Clark 2011, 169–77; Kristjánsdóttir 2023, 183–87.

45 DI I, 394–96.

46 DI II, 781; DI VIII, 5.

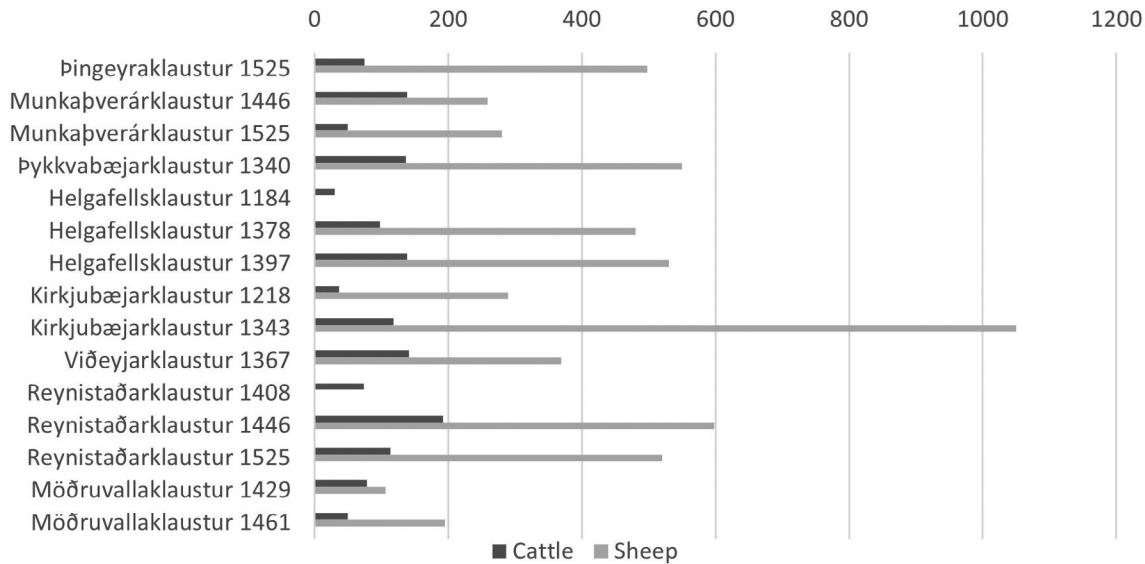


Figure 12.2. Number of animals owned by monastic houses in Iceland. Figure by author.

Kirkjubæjarklaustur in 1343 may underline the emphasis on textile production in the convent on a larger scale than ever before, but also a larger household with an increased number of lay workers.

Interestingly, the inventory made in Kirkjubæjarklaustur in 1343 also listed a great number of elaborate clothes, although there were no more than one or two priests serving the nuns at any time. Oddly enough, an inventory made in 1397 lists enough chasubles for twenty-four priests.⁴⁷ The extra chasubles may thus have been stock from their textile manufacturing. It is worth underlining that an elaborate chasuble, for example, could have a value comparable to that of three or four farms — or one book.⁴⁸ Moreover, Bishop Vilchin (in office 1391–1405) officially praised the textile work in Kirkjubæjarklaustur during his visitation in 1397, and purchased tapestries from the nuns to cover all four walls of the so-called large hall in Skálholt episcopal see, as well as several ecclesiastical garments for the cathedral there.⁴⁹ The textile work carried out there was thus certainly not a secondary occupation, but whereas both literary and archaeological sources indicate the manufacture of expensive ecclesiastical fabrics and garments, textiles were most likely also produced for the wider public. Oddly enough, a recent study has shown that most of the material in the medieval cloths — the fabrics, the pigments, even yarn of silver and gold — was imported, but not the wool. For

example, in the antependium from Stafafell, made in Kirkjubæjarklaustur, the ground fabric is of imported coarse linen, but the embroidery is yarn of wool and linen of nine colours, of which most were imported. Linen was not grown in Iceland during the medieval period and only a few colours can be obtained locally.⁵⁰

An excavation carried out in the ruins of the female monastery, Kirkjubæjarklaustur, in 2002–2006 and 2022–2023 in fact revealed quite a lot about the textile- and menial work carried out there. Although the excavation of the ruins of Kirkjubæjarklaustur covered no more than one corner of the monastic lodgings, it clearly showed well-preserved traces of a vertical loom, a flat needle used for weaving, and sticking pins, besides miscellaneous utensils for a moderately large household.⁵¹ This in turn may, all in all, highlight the convent's focus on practical studies for both girls and adult women. However, some of the textile work must have been done by lay workers under the nuns' supervision, in addition to that carried out by the novices and nuns themselves, whereas the work would have ranged from collecting the wool, spinning, weaving, dyeing, designing, and decorating.

The earliest inventory to include a count of the livestock at the female monastery of Reynistaðarklaustur was made due to changes in stewardship in 1408, shortly after the plague had struck the country for the first time causing great loss of life.⁵² At that point, on the home

⁴⁷ DI II, 781; DI IV, 238; DI VIII, 5.

⁴⁸ Jónsson 1916–1929, 234–35.

⁴⁹ *Lögmannsannáll*, 287–88.

⁵⁰ Guðjónsson 2023, 113–14.

⁵¹ Mímisson and Einarsson 2002, 49; Parsons 2018.

⁵² Kristjánsdóttir 2017, 366.

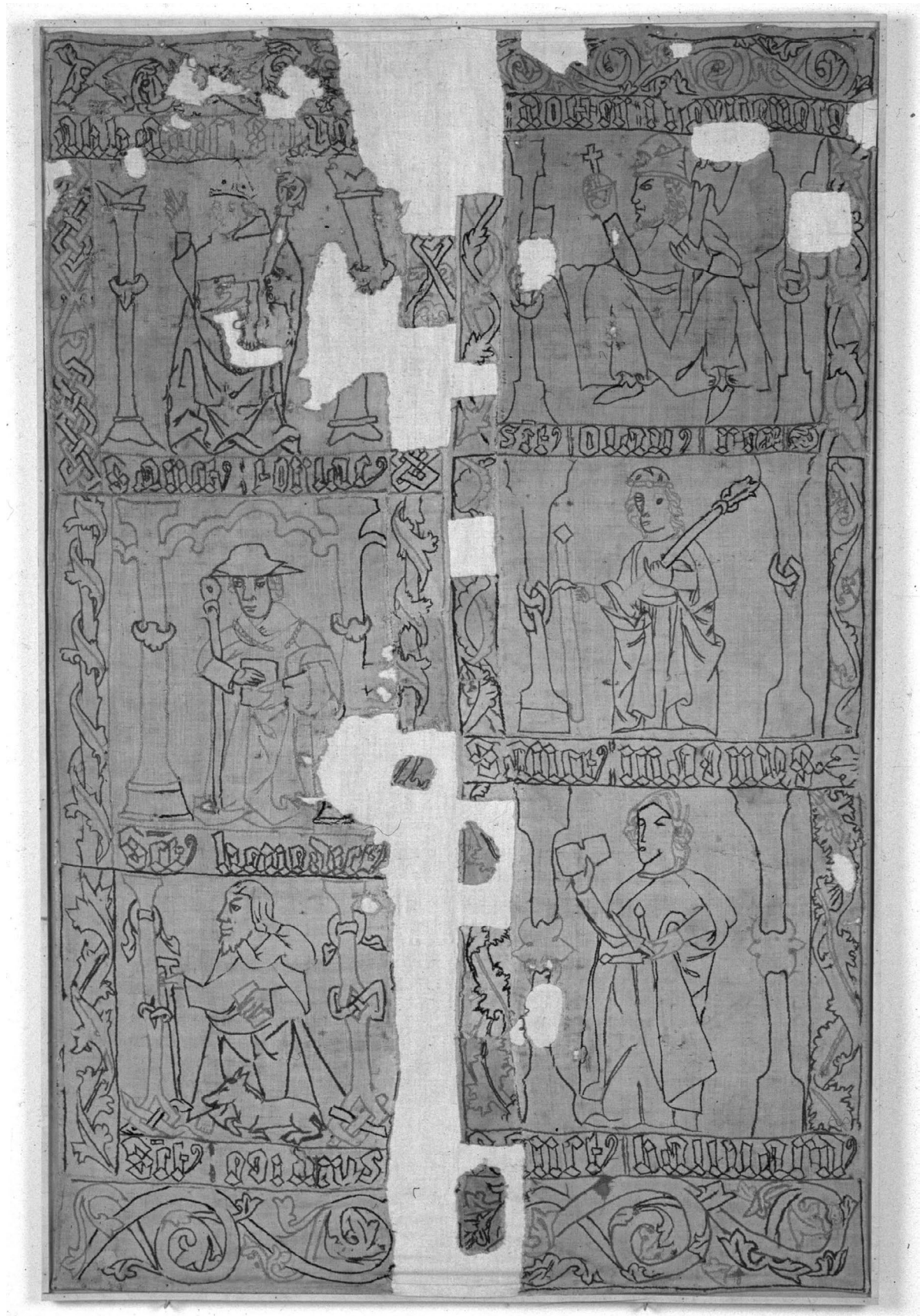


Figure 12.3. The cloth from Skarð. © National Museum of Iceland.

farm the livestock included twenty-two cows, nine bulls, thirty-six bulls, and seven calves, but no sheep or lambs.⁵³ When the livestock in Reynistaðarklaustur was counted again in 1446 it had increased enormously. At the convent's home farm, there were by then no fewer than 598 sheep, and 192 head of cattle.⁵⁴ The last inventory for Reynistaðarklaustur was compiled in 1525. At that point there were 520 sheep and 114 head of cattle.⁵⁵ These three inventories show that the number of sheep increased from zero to 520 during the fifteenth century, most likely due to the growing demand for ecclesiastical fabrics and the general recovery from the plague.

Investigations on the currently preserved ecclesiastical cloths from Reykjahlíð, Draflastaðir, Skarð, Svalbarð, and Grenjaðarstaðir strongly indicate that they were all manufactured in Reynistaðarklaustur.⁵⁶ The most elaborate cloth preserved is undeniably an antependium from Grenjaðarstaðir. It has been on display in the Louvre Museum in Paris for some time now but was given to the king of France, Charles X, from a French antique collector in 1829. It is particularly noteworthy — from a feminist point of view — that when it was noticed in the 1950s that it had been made in Iceland, only a short article was published on the discovery in the women's magazine *Melkorka*.⁵⁷ This is in stark contrast to when important discoveries have been made about the manuscripts. Similarly, the ecclesiastical cloth from Skarð, embroidered with images of six saints and the name of the last abbess of Reynistaðarklaustur Sólveig Hrafnadóttir, has been interpreted as being simple or naive⁵⁸ but, upon closer examination, it appears to be half-finished (Fig. 12.3).⁵⁹ It is worth noting that only one tapestry has been preserved from Iceland. It is the tapestry from Hvammur and it is believed to have been made in Kirkjubæjarklaustur.⁶⁰

As can be seen from Figure 12.2, the male monastic houses even ran mixed ranges of sheep and cattle, showing their wealth and also that they housed a large number of people. The cattle may also have been raised for making manuscripts — although very few calves appear to have been present when the inventories were carried out — but the sheep were for general textile production in the country, as demand for cloths besides ecclesiastically embroidered ones appears to have generally been high. For example, an interesting

corrody contract is preserved, about textile making in the male monastic house at Munkaþverárklaustur in 1498. The contract regards the lay couple Arnþrúður Árnadóttir and Jón Sigfússon. Jón was supposed to carry out both iron- and woodwork for the abbot, but Arnþrúður was to make garments and cloths for him.⁶¹

Textile Furnishing in the Monastic Houses

There are several documents of different kinds preserved that show how richly the monastic houses were furnished with miscellaneous valuable textiles, notably not only of wool but also linen and silk, dyed with the various colours and/or embroidered with silver and gold threads. In an inventory made in the male monastic house Helgafellsklaustur in 1397 it is listed that two of the narthex walls of the church were covered with 'good' wall-hangings. It is highly likely that they were embroidered with ecclesiastical images but where they were made is not known. Moreover, other quarters of Helgafellsklaustur were also furnished with fabric wall-hangings according to the inventory from 1397. These were the abbot's lodgings, the sacristy, the 'convent' (*sic*), and a room named *miklastofa*. By then, there were also twenty chasubles, fourteen gowns, twelve robes, four dalmatics, twenty vestments, and eight antependia listed among the monastery's possessions.⁶² The monastic church of the male house in Þykkvabæjarklaustur was even richer in ecclesiastical clothes. In 1340, the monastic buildings had thirty beds, described with the various kinds of blankets. Four of the rooms were surrounded by wall-hangings and tapestries, as were the hall, the abbot's lodgings, the *miklastofa*, and the refectory.⁶³

The male monastic house, Munkaþverárklaustur, was inspected in 1429, the same year that it had burnt down in its entirety in a catastrophic and deadly fire. The textiles it possessed by then must have been lost in the fire but the 1429 inventory was completed while the monastery was being reconstructed. By then fourteen chasubles, eighteen gowns, five antependia, and four vestments are listed in the monastic church there.⁶⁴ In 1525, there were on the other hand six chasubles more than in 1429 but five fewer gowns. What is new on the list are five robes and two dalmatics. The number of antependia and vestments have similarly grown.⁶⁵ Slightly fewer cloths are listed in the 1525 inventory for the male

53 DI III, 718.

54 DI IV, 700.

55 DI IX, 320–22.

56 Jónsdóttir 1965, 134–47; Sigurðardóttir 1988, 245–52; Guðjónsson 1997, 85.

57 See Wandel 1952, 51–54; Guðjónsson 1991.

58 Eldjárn 1963, no. 18.

59 Kristjánsdóttir 2017, 385–86.

60 Guðjónsson 1985, 9–10.

61 DI IV, 684–85.

62 DI IV, 171.

63 DI II, 738–39.

64 DI IV, 374.

65 DI IX, 305–06.

house in Þingeyraklaustur than for Munkaþverárklaustur, although both were Benedictine houses run under Hólar bishopric.⁶⁶ Möðruvallaklaustur was the only Augustinian monastery run there. The 1525 inventory highlights its smaller size compared to the Augustinian monasteries inside Skálholt bishopric, but merely five wall-hangings are listed in it.⁶⁷ Still, some information may even be gained about cloths in Möðruvallaklaustur from descriptions of the event when the monastery there burnt down in 1316. There it says that after the fire had broken out, it spread quickly to the wall-hangings and tapestries in the choir, and from there into the sacristy, whereupon it became utterly uncontrollable.⁶⁸ The sacristy is the room where the clothes of the religious servants were kept, such as chasubles, robes, gowns, and dalmatics. A number of highly valuable cloths may thus have been lost in the fire but Möðruvallaklaustur was rebuilt in 1326 and refurnished at the same time.⁶⁹ As previously described, however, most outstanding were the textiles in both female convents, Kirkjubæjarklaustur and Reynistaðarklaustur, during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Although the ecclesiastical garments listed in Kirkjubæjarklaustur are only half of what the other female convent, Reynistaðarklaustur, possessed in 1408 the number of chasubles, gowns, and dalmatics is high there too. By then there were also six different kinds of tapestry, including two of wool, altogether measuring 52 ells in total.⁷⁰ Unfortunately, no inventories exist from Kirkjubæjarklaustur after the one made in 1397, except for one exclusively made for the silver kept there in 1494.⁷¹

The textiles mentioned above only describe those kept in the largest monastic houses operating in Iceland. Inventories undertaken for the two cathedrals, in Skálholt and Hólar, and the numerous churches found spread around Iceland during the Middle Ages, show that all the ecclesiastical institutions there were also remarkably rich in valuable textiles of both wool and linen. These have not yet been systematically listed but work is underway to do so.⁷²

Concluding Remarks

This chapter discusses the manufacturing of manuscripts and textiles undertaken in the female and male

monasteries operating in Iceland in the Middle Ages. While texts and textiles are in fact both spun and woven fabrics, and the symbolic and pictographic messages they carry are equal to literal reality or fiction,⁷³ textiles have, nevertheless, long stood in the shadow of manuscripts. The reason for this downgrading of textile work does not seem to be found in the gendered obligations of the medieval Church or the making of textiles in general, but rather in the social phenomena of gender inequality, emerging along with the rise of academic research undertaken exclusively by men in post-Reformation times. These biases have ever since become engrained by being upheld by academic research dominated by men until the twentieth century.

Textile work has primarily been in the hands of women in Iceland from when it was settled in the ninth century until at least the seventeenth century when it was integrated into the male-dominated industrial world. Positions and work held by women are known to be, in current research, ranked lower than those of men. Women's work appears to have generally been regarded as a secondary occupation, usually standing outside the societies' official political and economic base even though such work merits substantial social value. It is most likely for this reason that textile work of any kind has not yet received either the status or inclusion in historical research that it deserves. The female scholars who did conduct research on the Icelandic medieval textiles around the mid-twentieth century never gained the recognition they deserved — they did not have a voice in the by-then male-dominated world of research. With regards to the collecting of antiquities, the subordinate classification of ecclesiastical clothes may also have been influenced by the Protestant and nationalistic emphasis in later times, when medieval literature written in Old Norse was considered of vast importance for the making of Nordic identity and culture, at least to a much higher degree than ecclesiastical textiles made for the medieval Catholic Church.

As demonstrated here the making of textiles was much more appreciated and valued during the Middle Ages — and indeed earlier — than it subsequently came to be among scholars from the sixteenth century onwards. The classification of women's textile work as subaltern to the male-dominated realm of writing during the medieval period thus seems to have started after the Reformation in the mid-sixteenth century and continued until the present day.

⁶⁶ DI IX, 312–13.

⁶⁷ DI IX, 317–18.

⁶⁸ *Lárentius saga*, 367–68.

⁶⁹ Kristjánsdóttir 2017, 395–96.

⁷⁰ DI III, 717–18.

⁷¹ DI VII, 232.

⁷² See <<https://steinunn.hi.is/is/rannsoknirresearch/samspil-manns-og-natturu>> [accessed 1 December 2024].

⁷³ See Barthes 1977, 16–20; Hyer 2019; Bildhauer 2020, 74–78.

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13. Gender and Ornamental Practices, c. 1000–1350

Reassessing the Interpretative History

On 15 February AD 1018, a peaceful settlement between the king of the Svíar and the king of Norway was reached through mediation by Jarl Rognvald and other men of high rank at the Uppsala assembly. Included in the agreement was a nuptial union between King Óláfr's (Olaf Skötkonung) daughter Ingigerðr and King Óláfr Haraldsson (St Olaf). However, this part of the agreement was never realized and Ingigerðr was married to Yaroslav the Wise, grand prince of Kyiv.¹ At the court in Novgorod, Ingigerðr engaged in both local and international political affairs, for example by sheltering King Óláfr's illegitimate son Magnus Olafsson (later King Magnus the Good), who had to flee Norway when his father was dethroned in 1028. In addition to being politically active, Ingigerðr led an exemplary life by religious standards. Her good deeds and her role in the construction of the cathedrals in Kyiv and Novgorod made her a saint, in common with the man she did not marry.² Before the marriage between Ingigerðr and Olaf was reneged by her father, she had talked things over with Jarl Rognvald. In the aftermath of this conversation, at least according to the presentation of the event in the *Saga of Saint Olaf* written by the Icelandic poet, compiler, and historian Snorri Sturluson (AD 1179–1241): 'Hon sendi Óláfi konungi slœður af pelli ok gullsauaðar mjök ok silkiræmur' (She [Ingigerðr] sent King Óláfr a long trailing robe of fine cloth and richly embroidered with gold and some silken puttees [strips of cloth]).³

Snorri's sartorial information was penned two centuries after the negotiations in Uppsala, and it is found in a saga more interested in promoting the deeds of St Olaf than in details concerning the making of clothing. Nonetheless, Snorri notes the materials (gold, silk), the applied techniques of its making (embroidery), and that the robe was sent as a gift from Ingigerðr. There is no information about whether she was involved in its making or if she merely commissioned it. Moreover, there is no information about the robe's design or any indication as to how its audiences were to engage with or contemplate its gold thread decoration. Despite the lack of material and written evidence about the robe itself, and the uncertainties regarding Ingigerðr's possible involvement in the making of it, and in St Olaf's reception of the gift, I will, from the perspective of an art historian, take Snorri's reference as a point of departure for a chapter that seeks to reassess the interpretative history of an artisanal practice in late Viking Age and medieval Scandinavia often associated with women, namely embroidery. Although Ingigerðr's gift may not have had any religious intent, I will further contribute to the hermeneutical layers of Snorri's reference by seeing her gift as a reflection of another practice often associated with women at the turn of the first millennium, that is the pious donations of textiles and other embellishments to ecclesiastical institutions. Considering these practices in parallel, I aim to unlock some of the reciprocal dynamics among matter, practices, objects, and women's 'margin to act' through the realm of ornament.⁴

¹ King Olaf (St Olaf) was married to Astrid, Ingigerðr's half-sister.

² Edberg 1997.

³ Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla: Óláfs saga helga*, ch. 80 (2014). The 1932 translation says, 'She sent King Olaf a fur cape, gold-embroidered and trimmed with silk.'

⁴ 'The margin to act' is a framework that considers the societal constraints and one that recognizes that in whatever circumstance and for every maker in the past, male or female, the

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Embroidery and Gender Perceptions

The word embroidery comes from the French word *broderie*, meaning embellishment or ornamentation and designates the craft of decorating fabric or other materials using a needle to apply thread or yarn. In the early medieval period however, ornamental needlework would be referred to in several ways, at times pointing to geographical origins and at times to the technique. When Isidore of Seville (c. AD 560–636) compiled his *Etymologiae*, he appointed the Bronze Age Phrygians as instrumental in the development of the art of embroidery:

An embroidered garment is woven or decorated with a needle. This is also called Phrygian because all the Phrygians are said to be skilled in this art, or because it was invented in Phrygia. Whence also the artisans who practice this are called ‘embroiderers’ (*Phrygio*).⁵

However, there is considerable archaeological evidence that embroidered textiles were relished in various earlier cultures such as the New Kingdom of Egypt (c. 1550–c. 1069 BC), among the Scythians (c. 900 BC–AD 200), and in Warring State China (c. 475–221 BC).⁶

Isidore’s quotation addresses an aspect of embroidery that has haunted its historiography for centuries, confounding technical terms and geographical origins, also by those who tried to write embroidery into the art historical discourse in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁷ Semantic challenges in archival sources and the lack of preserved material are challenging for any scholar engaging in premodern art. Embroidery has further languished from its post-medieval connotations. Through processes explored by Roszika Parker in her pioneering book *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (1984), embroidery went from being a major art form in the Middle Ages that was practised by both men and women, to being considered a feminine, domestic craft in more recent times. Parker’s analyses were articulated predominantly with regard to England, an area where professional embroiders of both sexes were trained in *opus anglicanum*, an exquisite form of embroidery exported all over the Continent c. AD 1100–1350, only to see that both male embroiders and the art form’s professionalism and guild structures were obscured by the nineteenth-century practitioners

of Victorian medievalism.⁸ In their short overview of medieval embroidery, Astrid Castres and Nadège Gauffre Fayolle cautiously differentiate between the professional needlework done by both men and women in embroidery ateliers and workshops and needlework as an essential activity in the education of women within domestic settings.⁹ Although embroidery may have been practised with variations of gender inclusion and professionalism across early medieval Europe, popular notions of the craft hold that the association between embroidery and womanhood was historically so entrenched that, as Parker argued, ‘to know the history of embroidery is to know the history of women’.¹⁰

Parker’s book includes many examples from the field of literature that suggest embroidery is a compensation for male absence or echoes of the women’s inner states of mind, which still resonates well with a general downgrade of the art form.

Traditionally, women have called embroidery ‘work’. Although to some extent an appropriate term, it tends to confirm the stereotypical notion that patience and perseverance go into embroidery — but little else. [...] That embroiderers do transform materials to produce sense — whole ranges of meanings — is invariably entirely overlooked.¹¹

Similar ideas of embroidery as stereotypical of femininity can also be found in nineteenth-century Scandinavia. One example is a poem by the Norwegian writer Johan Sebastian Welhaven (1807–1873), *Til Frøken E med en samling bordeermønstre* (*To Miss E. with a Collection of Embroidery Patterns*). The poem opens with the verse ‘Samlingen er lidt chaotisk: pompejansk, chinesisk, gothisk; men i manges Dames Indre er Forvirringen ei mindre, og som disse vredne Ranker groe den lille Daares Tanker’ (The collection is a little chaotic; Pompeian, Chinese, Gothic; but in the minds of many ladies; the confusion is no less; and as these twisted tendrils, grow the thoughts in the little fool). It ends with the lines ‘Løier over alle løier; på de fine klare Tøier kan De nu med nålen prente Alt hvad damen har in mente’ (Amusement over all amusement, on the blank garments, you may print with the needle everything that is on the Lady’s mind).¹²

Nonetheless, when Swedish textile historian and archaeologist Agnes Geijer noted that ‘In Old Norse sagas and ballads, embroidery is seen as a praiseworthy

making of art necessitated a conscious commitment of resources, see Martin 2016.

5 Coatsworth 2016, 52.

6 Geijer 1980b; Baert 2012; Postrel 2020.

7 Coatsworth 2016.

8 See, for example, Browne, Davies, and Michael 2016, 1–75.

9 Castres and Gauffre Fayolle in Descatoire 2019, 14.

10 Parker 1984, foreword. Also see Herlihy 1990.

11 Parker 1984, 6.

12 See Welhaven 1907, 66–68. Author’s translation.

activity for women¹³ she was right insofar as praiseworthy refers to an act that deserves approval and admiration, not merely something appropriate. Whereas the Old Norse sagas and poetry mostly contain references to women weavers and to how women created stories with their shuttles,¹⁴ the *Volsunga Saga*, a legendary saga in late thirteenth-century prose, relates how the Valkyrie Brynhild applies gold thread to a fabric ‘Hon sat í einni skemmu við meýjar sínar. Hon kunni meiaa hagleik enn aðrar konur. Hon lagði sinn borða með gulli ok saumaði a þau stórmerki er Sigurðr hafði gert’ (She lived in her own quarters with her maidens. She was more skilled in the domestic arts than other women. She was working her tapestry with gold thread and embroidering on it the deeds performed by Sigurd).¹⁵

The corpus of Norse medieval popular ballads has quite a few references to embroidery and the following examples serve well to cast light on the matter. When a young lady has her hand deformed by an accidental cut from a knight’s sword, her father approaches her with the concern: ‘Hvem skal nu dit røde Guld gøre? og hvem da skal dine Ærmer snøre’ (Who is now supposed to make your red gold [i.e., your embroidery])? And who will help you dress?). The lady assures her father that her sisters will assist her. The knight guilty of the cut happens to eavesdrop on the conversation between father and daughter and asks for permission to marry the lady, assuring daughter and father that his sisters will assist her in the making of embroideries, and that his female servants will help dress the lady.¹⁶

Another ballad recounts how a sorrowful lady is grieving to such an extent she cannot do her embroidery properly. She applies silk where she was supposed to apply gold, and vice versa, ‘Det syed hun med Silke, som hun med Guld skulde virke. Og det syed hun med Gulde, som hun med Silke skulde’ (She embroidered with silk, what she was supposed to make with gold. And she embroidered with gold what she should have made with silk).¹⁷ As for the workforce required for a prominent gown, one ballad informs us that the young lady Kirsti dresses in a gown made of silk so elaborate nine virgins were required for its making, ‘Hun drog i en Silkesærk, var ni Jomfruer deres Haandeværk’ (She wore a gown of silk, was the craft of nine virgins).¹⁸ The ballads present embroidery as an activity for unmarried and married women alike, giving the impression the activity was of such importance that a woman deprived of her ability to work with the needle was of no interest

to men of her rank. Moreover, it seems embroidery demanded all of a woman’s attention, meaning it was not a routine activity one could be expected to do regardless of one’s state of mind.

Whereas Ingigerðr’s involvement in textile activities is not known, a number of women of noble pedigree elsewhere in northern Europe were lauded for their excellence in textile production in general and more particularly in embroidery. In fact, even Virgin Mary excelled in textile arts. According to the Protoevangelium of St James, the Virgin was among the virgins from the tribe of David who helped weave by lot. Mary was given the scarlet and pure purple threads, the former as a symbol for virtuousness and the latter for royalty. In the pre-Carolingian period and in the Eastern Church, she is often depicted in the act of spinning purple thread or weaving the cloth at the moment the Archangel Gabriel appeared to her.¹⁹ Mirroring the Virgin’s accomplishment in textile matters, a number of queens and abbesses from Anglo-Saxon and early medieval sources are known to have been praised for their embroidery skills. Nowhere were women (or laymen) allowed to hold ecclesiastical offices or to touch any of the sacred possessions of the Church. The prohibition included all material, even the liturgical textiles which — often unlike manuscripts, liturgical paraphernalia of gold and silver, and devotional sculptures in wood or stone — were manufactured by female hands to begin with. Much scholarship has thus been devoted to the many forms of indirect female presence and the sensory pleasure that were included in these donations and to women’s textile contributions to the splendour of sacred space.²⁰

No similar trustworthy sources from Scandinavia can tell us if Scandinavian queens engaged in embroidery or made donations of embroidered textiles a part of their royal decorum in the period c. 1000–1350. The capricious *De omnibus Gothorum Sueonumque regibus* (*History of All Kings of Goths and Swedes*) by the Uppsala Archbishop Johannes Magnus (1488–1544) posited that Gunnhildr, queen consort of King Anund Jacob (Olof Skötkonung’s son) founded the Gudhem monastery and that she, in her capacity as a pious woman, and the other nuns occupied themselves with the making of magnificent embroideries for religious establishments:

19 *Protoevangelium of James*, 10.1–7; Griffiths 2011, 350. Also see Maguire 1990.

20 For Anglo-Saxon women, see Schulenburg 2009; Griffiths 2011; Miller 2014; Diener 2014. See Steinunn J. Kristjánsdóttir’s chapter in this volume for the role of women in cloth production and donations to religious institutions in Iceland. Strategies for securing female presence in inaccessible religious spaces through embroidery is also known from other regions, such as Buddhist Japan, see Wargula 2021.

13 Geijer 1980a, 259.

14 Norman 2008.

15 *Volsunga saga*, ch. 25. Also see Wicker 2012, 891.

16 *Danske folkeviser*, no. 42.

17 *Danske folkeviser*, no. 15.

18 *Danske folkeviser*, no. 36.



Figure 13.1. The collar found in grave 15 in Valsgärde. \$Photo: Lina Pettersson Schweitzer, © Gustavianum, Uppsala universitetsmuseum.

‘Sed nec intertie otio effluerere passa, quotidiana consuetudine excuisita sacrariorum ornamenta fingeat, in que eandem operam continua ancillarum curam cogeat’ (But she did not pass her days in idleness as she made it her daily habit to create exquisite ornaments for the sacrarium [the church]).²¹ Among the exquisite ornaments, was a chasuble woven of precious material and embellished with marvellous art that was donated to Roskilde Cathedral.

Embroidered Garments in the Viking Age and the Anglo-Saxon World

In the same way as we are deprived of information about Ingigerðr’s involvement in the making of the robe with gold embroidery, we are deprived of information about its overall design and iconography. Snorre’s description may have been influenced by embroidered textiles of his own time, or even by a reference to a similar costume in the *Nestor Chronicle* written in 1113, ‘Now this Haakon was blind, and he had a robe all embroidered with gold.’²² Haakon was a Varangian chieftain who was called for by Jaroslav when the latter felt threatened by the actions of one of his brothers. In addition to Haakon’s cloths, textile fragments from archaeological finds at eight different sites attest to the presence of gold or silver wrapped silk thread embroidery in Viking Age Scandinavia, namely Gokstad, Ness, Birka, Valsgärde, Önsvala, Hørning Church, Mammen, and Slots Bjergby.²³ Now in admittedly poor condition,

they all provide pieces of information about the textile world of Ingigerðr and her contemporaries.²⁴

The Gokstad textiles (c. AD 890) testify to gold thread embroidery in the form of a dense interlace of foliage and tendrils and five strips of tablet weaving. At Birka, around sixty graves contained tablet-woven bands. These were found in male and female graves and were all brocaded with metal thread, and all considered to be imported works.²⁵ The Bjerringhøj (Mammen) embroideries were all part of what must have been the splendid costume of a man buried in a chamber-grave during the winter of 970–971. Human masks of different sizes, a leopard, a pair of beasts, a bird, and an acanthus vine on woollen strips exhibit iconographical variation, while a pair of mantle ribbons with gold thread weave and two cuffs with gold thread embroidery in geometrical patterns underline the high rank of the buried person.²⁶ A collar from Valsgärde that originally may have been around 50 cm long and 6.5 cm high shows tendrils and buds in silver couching and stem stitches on silk. The collar was found in grave 15 in Valsgärde and is dated to the tenth century (Fig. 13.1).²⁷ There is no gold or silver thread embroidery in the textiles from Oseberg, but the embroidered silk strips demonstrate that the pictorial arrangements were in the form of spiral bands, vegetal motifs, as well as one strip with an embroidered cross with stylized birds between the cross arms.²⁸

From other parts of Europe, gold thread embroidery is found for example in the Anglo-Saxon Maaseik bands from around AD 800. The Maaseik bands were

21 Johannes Magnus, *De omnibus*, 584.

22 Larsson 1993, 76.

23 Vedeler 2014, 55. In addition to these Scandinavian sites, metal thread embroidery is also found on textiles from Eura Luistari and Tampere Vilusenharju in Finland. Silk thread embroidery is found at five sites, namely Birka, Valsgärde, Hvilehøj, Gokstad, and Oseberg. For the latter, and on silk embroidery in general, see Christensen and Nockert 2006, 325–43.

24 On metal thread embroidery, see Geijer 1980b, 21–24.

25 The Birka textiles are kept in the Swedish History Museum, Stockholm. See Geijer 1938 and Peters 2002.

26 The National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen, inv. nos C135a, C137, and C138. See Iversen 1991, Jones 2005, and Rimstad and others 2021.

27 Uppsala University Museum, Gustavianum, Uppsala, inv. no. 5915:1107.

28 Embroidery 12 B3, see Christensen and Nockert 2006, 328 and 400.



Figure 13.2. Detail from the 'Star Mantle' of Henry II (1014–1024). © bavarikon.de, CC BY 4.0.

not original to, but once part of what is now called the chasuble of saints Harlindis and Renlindis, donated to the shrine at the abbey in Aldeneik at an unknown date. The chasuble was relocated to a church in nearby Maaseik in the sixteenth century and remained inside a reliquary until it was rediscovered in the nineteenth century.²⁹ The Maaseik bands are made of silk and gold embroidery and display arcade strips and roundel strips, foliage, animals, and four indecipherable monograms. The bands testify to Anglo-Saxon embroidery as items with a material conduit of high value. If they did not originally embody religious intentions, they were given such when they were made part of the donation to the shrine.³⁰ With regard to Anglo-Saxon art of media other than textiles, Melissa Herman has demonstrated that the makers 'used specific materials, worked in a precise manner, and formed a distinctive design, in order to influence the way in which a viewer perceived and engaged with the art of the time'.³¹ There is every reason to believe the Maaseik bands were planned with the same intent in one of the many independent or semi-independent Anglo-Saxon embroidery workshops run by women.³²

Garments from Ingigerðr's time are hardly preserved, but three exceptional mantles executed at artistic centres in the Holy Roman Empire attest to large-scale gold thread embroidery: the 'Star Mantle' of Henry II (1014–1024) (Fig. 13.2), the Blue Mantle of St Kunigunde (1000–1025), and the 'Coronation' Mantle of King Stephen of Hungary (1031).³³ Although much restored, the two dedicatory inscriptions on the 'Star Mantle' are believed to be largely intact, testifying to the importance given to the recipient, the donor, and — not least — to the medium of gold embroidery itself at the time of its creation.³⁴ Produced in Germany, the mantle was most probably commissioned by Ishmael, duke of Bari and given to Henry during the duke's stay in Bamberg in an attempt to seek the latter's support for an uprising against the Byzantines. Moreover, it seems to have been crafted as an imperial robe, but as Henry offered it to Bamberg Cathedral shortly after he received it, its afterlife was that of an ecclesiastical vestment.³⁵ In addition to inscriptions, the mantle is generously decorated with a number of heavenly bodies, both

²⁹ The chasuble is preserved in St Catherine's Church in Maaseik, Belgium.

³⁰ Lester-Makin 2019, 166–69.

³¹ Herman 2016.

³² Lester-Makin 2019, 144–46.

³³ The 'Star Mantle' of Henry II and the Blue Mantle of St Kunigunde are both in the Diözesanmuseum, Bamberg. The 'Coronation' Mantle of King Stephen of Hungary is kept in the National Museum of Hungary, Budapest.

³⁴ Coatsworth and Owen-Crocker 2018, 75.

³⁵ Coatsworth and Owen-Crocker 2018, 76. Also see Ganz 2014.

in the form of zodiacs and planets and in the form of saints, cherubim, and seraphim.

The mantle of Empress Kunigunde, Henry II's wife, is decorated with scenes relating to Christ's Nativity, saints Peter and Paul, and prophecies of Christ's coming. The iconography of this mantle pertains to a religious sphere only as there are no worldly imperial motifs.³⁶ The 'Coronation Mantle' of King Stephen of Hungary has an inscription that runs horizontally around the mantle: 'This chasuble was made and given to the church of St Mary located in the city alba in the year 1031 in the 14th indiction by King Stephen and Queen Gisela.'³⁷ The iconography of this Byzantine twill silk mantle with gold thread embroidery includes rows of angels, prophets, apostles, and saints in juxtaposition, possibly alluding all those who venerate the Almighty in the well-known hymn *Te Deum*.³⁸ These three mantles were made for related family members as Gisela was the sister of Emperor Henry II and sister-in-law of Empress Kunigunde, and they were all made in ways that had dynastic politics and religious beliefs fused in material display.³⁹

Could Snorri's reference to 'gullsaumaðar mjök ok silkiræmur' point to a similar material display? That is not possible to ascertain, but his reference to 'af pelli' probably refers to silk fabrics or other fine textiles of foreign origin. Several Anglo-Saxon sources emphasize that it was through embroidery and gold thread weaving that women were promoted as the makers of vestments. They could practice their skill on imported silk as well as on locally produced linen and wool. The robe made for King Olaf may thus have been imported all together or decorated in Svíar on an imported silk fabric. The textile fragments found at various sites in Scandinavia offer a vague hint at the robe's possible ornamental decoration. The predominance of geometrical patterns, foliage, masks, and animals in the fragments indicates that King Olaf's robe may have had non-figurative borders with the possible inclusion of masks and/or animals, rather than comprehensive iconographical compositions based on Scripture and patristic texts as the 'Star Mantle' and the 'Coronation Mantle' do. Naturally, there are very few Christian symbols in the textile fragments. Because the robe was a gift for a baptized king from a baptized princess, Christian iconography may have

been included, too. One imagined ornament feasible for an experienced embroiderer would be a gold-thread variation of the filigree pattern forming the figure of Christ on a ninth-century silver pendant crucifix from a woman's grave at Birka.⁴⁰

The three spectacular embroidered silk mantles preserved in Bamberg and Budapest were manufactured to blend secular and sacred power. Similar practices are known from Kyivan Rus where secular clothing was observed in churches because the princes donated them in their memory.⁴¹ Ingigerðr's gift to St Olaf may have been made and given with the same twofold objective, initially for the king to use and then to be transferred to an ecclesiastical jurisdiction, although this practice may not yet have been common in the early days of Christianity in Scandinavia.

It has been argued that women were more inclined to convert to Christianity and that their cultural patronage was instrumental in societal shifts.⁴² Ingigerðr would have been in a position to be instrumental and able to initiate practices performed on the Continent, but this cannot be verified. Ingeborg of Denmark (1174–1237), another Scandinavian-born princess married off to a foreign court, offered a liturgical vestment to the dean of Amiens for spiritual benefits: 'We have sent a chasuble asking that you include us in your prayers and [...] that you should make us participants in the offices and benefices that are held there.'⁴³ This donation may indicate that royal women in Scandinavia had adopted the presence-through-adornment strategies from their peers on the Continent, but it may also indicate that Ingeborg acted as was expected of her in her role as a French queen.

Gender and the Ornamentation of Sculptures

In addition to liturgical textiles for the altar and the clergy, one further category of embellishment emerged in sources concerning the embroidery work of Anglo-Saxon holy women, namely the dressing of devotional sculpture. This category includes dressing in the form of purpose-made or repurposed personal garments as well as ornamentation in the form of girdles, crowns, and necklaces.⁴⁴ I take the opportunity to further my discussion about Ingigerðr's possible involvement in the making of the robe for St Olaf in the light of her

36 Coatsworth and Owen-Crocker 2018, 101–02.

37 'Indiction' refers to a fifteen-year period, originally to a periodic reassessment of taxation in the Roman Empire, see Coatsworth and Owen-Crocker 2018, 81.

38 Coatsworth and Owen-Crocker 2018, 80–83.

39 Ottonian illuminated manuscripts also display royal and/or religious vestments with gold thread embroidery, such as the Gospel Book of Otto III (998–1001), the Sacramentary of Henry II (before 1024), and the Uta Codex (c. 1025).

40 Swedish History Museum, Stockholm, inv. no. 34 000: Bj. 660.

41 See Rezansky 1972.

42 Wicker 2012. Also see Gräslund 2006 and Staeker 2006.

43 Griffiths 2011, 346–47.

44 Clegg-Hyer 2019, 20–22.

assumed cultural patronage and her possible involvement in so-called minor arts by addressing medieval women's margins to act through the realm of ornaments of silver and gold. Coming to terms with the word ornament, I pair the definition championed by Oleg Grabar, 'ornament is that aspect of decoration which seems not to have another purpose but to enhance its carrier',⁴⁵ with the one promoted by Margaret Goehring, 'ornament may be defined as both a method of image-making and a strategy to amplify meaning'.⁴⁶ To what extent sculptures were embellished in Scandinavia in Ingigerðr's time is uncharted. We may assume, however, that she would be familiar with adorned deities well before her arrival in Novgorod through familiarity with pagan temples. In the *Saga of Olaf Trygvasson*, Snorri describes King Olaf's visit to a pagan temple during which 'þá sat þar Þórr ok var mest tignaðr af öllum goðum, búinn með gulli ok silfri' (he saw Thor sitting there, the most honoured of all the gods and adorned with gold and silver).⁴⁷ In the famous description of the temple in Uppsala, Adam of Bremen (before 1050–1081/1085) remarked that the temple was 'totum ex auro paratum est', entirely decked out in gold. However, in the descriptions of the gods on display — Thor, Odin, and Freya — he concentrated on reasons for worshipping them rather than their appearance.⁴⁸

The pious donations to sculptures by the Anglo-Saxon holy women were imitated by queens and women of religious orders in France and England from the thirteenth century onwards, and from the fourteenth century by women of the parish. A typical example of the latter is the Tournai woman who in 1325 stated in her will that she wanted 'my good tissue to care for the image of Notre-Dame in Tournai'.⁴⁹ Examples from medieval Norway and Sweden are few but telling. A woman by the name Ingebjørg Munansdatter donated a shimmering (as if of gold) headscarf ('eith gulrænt skauth') to Munkeliv monastery in Bergen in 1349, so that the monks in the convent would be able to wrap God's body ('vars herra likam').⁵⁰ Whether this headscarf is to be interpreted as a velum intended to cover the crucifix (God's body) during Lent or as a corporal, a cloth intended to cover the host (God's body), remains undetermined. When compiling her will in 1359, a woman referred to as Märta from Sanda

donated the finest brooch ('fibula') of all those she possessed ('de omnibus quas habeo meliorem') to the image (probably sculpture) of the Virgin in Vårfruberga Abbey near Strängnäs.⁵¹ Unfortunately, the material composition of the fibula is not revealed.

Similar pious bequests are possibly what are referenced in two unique documents from the fourteenth century, namely the inventories from the parish churches of Hålandsdalen (1306) and Ylmheim (1321, additions from 1323).⁵² In addition to brief descriptions of all the items in the church rooms, both inventories disclose a detail — and possibly a related devotional act — namely the embellishing of crucifixes and sculptures with fabrics, silver bracelets, and silver brooches. In Hålandsdalen, there was 'Jtem æin kross stor cum mari et Johanne med sex silfr spongum þriar vm huarn arm ok [æ]in silfr sylgia' (one large cross with Mary and John with six silver rings, three on each arm, and one silver brooch) and this was matched in Ylmheim by 'Jtem æinn kross klædr med ok þell tuæimr silfr spongum vm mitt ok vi vm armanna' (a cross dressed in *þell* [probably silk] with two silver rings around the waist and six around the arms). Unfortunately, we may never know who enriched the crucifixes with silver bracelets and silk or brocade, and possibly the sculpture of Mary with the brooch, but the lived religion of Ingebjørg Munansdatter, Märta from Sanda, and women elsewhere in twelfth- to fourteenth-century northern Europe indicate these donations may have been made by women in the parish.⁵³

Whereas precious objects were given for spiritual benefits on the part of the benefactor, gifts to the images in the church also invested the image with an increased material as well as spiritual value. In relation to images of the Virgin, Ralph Dekoninck has proposed that due to the rule of decorum it is advised not only to honour images of the Virgin but also to embellish them with the most precious objects to materially express this honour. Moreover, such honouring practices would partly conceal the more mundane materiality of the sculpture itself (wood), allowing the material additions (golden cross, silver bracelet) to enhance the power of the images instead.⁵⁴ The embellishments of the crucifix

45 Grabar 1992, 5.

46 Goehring 2013, 53.

47 Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla: King Olaf Trygvasson's Saga*, ch. 69.

48 Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum*, bk IV, ch. 26.

49 Trexler 1991, 196. English women engaged heavily in their parishes and offered their labour and donated household goods as well as clothing and jewellery, see French 2008, 37–48.

50 DN 11, 7. Also see Stang 2015, 151.

51 SDHK, no. 7597: 'jtem ymagini beate Virginis ibidem. vnam fibulam dictam wlgariter braaz. de omnibus quas habeo meliorem'.

52 DN 21, 7 and DN 15, 8.

53 For further discussion of the donation to Munkeliv and the embellishment of the crucifixes in Hålandsdalen and Ylmheim, see Bø 2019. The *máldagi* from Iceland do not relate anything concerning bejewelled sculptures, but they are rich in references to textile adornments of churches and other church properties and donations.

54 Dekoninck 2012.

(or the host) in Munkeliv, the Virgin in Vårfruberga, and the crucifixes in Ylmheim and Hålandsdalen may also be considered devotional interventions in the religious material culture to make the images more powerful in their religious settings. Besides, the crucifixes and other sculptures may have been embellished with bracelets, necklaces, and brooches for miraculous purposes as ‘decoration is often essential to the psychological functionality of artefacts’.⁵⁵ Embellished sculptures are thus more likely to be understood as able to perform miracles.⁵⁶

Despite her recognition as a saint, we have no information about Ingigerðr’s role as patron of any other gold-thread-embroidered fabrics other than the mantle presumably sent to Óláfr Haraldsson (St Olaf).⁵⁷ She

may nonetheless have become increasingly aware of the long-standing tradition of royal and/or holy women acting as patrons and makers of liturgical textiles for otherwise inaccessible sacred spaces. She may also have observed a continuation from the adornment of pagan gods with silver and gold — although Adam of Bremen’s description cannot be taken literally and although Ingigerðr may not have had access to temples in the same way as King Olaf Trygvasson — to the same royal and/or holy women’s role in providing accessories for devotional sculptures. Exceeding mere textile production and gift-giving practices, Ingigerðr, like her sisters on the Continent, may also have acted through the realm of ornament, at times with rich gold thread embroidery (‘guldsaumadr mjuk’), at times with silver and gold (‘með gulli ok silfri’).

55 Gell 1998, 74. A rather suggestive idea to be drawn from this is that the golden cross and the silver bracelets were donated not only to invest the sculptures with power or decorum, but also to have the donated items receive the already inert power of the holy image, before possibly being transferred back to secular use later on. When in a sculpture’s ‘guardianship’, the donated objects went out of commercial circulation and out of the heritage-line. The practice of donating precious accessories to sculptures in consecrated spaces may thus also be considered a gender-neutral way to protect one’s heirlooms, see Gilchrist 2013.

56 Golsenne 2010.

57 Her involvement in the frescoes with possible imagery of her family in St Sophia’s Cathedral in Kyiv is also elusive.

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14. Gender and Work under the Arctic Circle

A Household Perspective on Early Modern Economies in the North

For several decades, historians studying the early modern period, AD 1500–1800 have used a household perspective to understand the economies of the North. Households in this period and this part of the world would normally consist of a married couple, their children, and often hired workers: i.e., servants. The household formed an economic and caring unit. The members could live and work sometimes together, sometimes apart. In this text, I shall present and discuss some of the results and the questions that have been and are on the agenda today, with a focus on Norway. I will show how important a gender perspective on the household economy has been for studying questions of economic growth, care, and upbringing. My argument is that a close understanding of household economy is an essential approach for studying central gender questions such as ability, agency, authority, and diversity. This is possible thanks to rich archives from this period. The kings' laws from Copenhagen can be contrasted with what people actually did in Norway. Therefore, it is possible to gender the early modern Nordic past by making women's actions and attitudes as visible as men's. A central question is the impact of gender division of work on the household economy of the North.

Household Perspective on Pre-industrial Economies

Early modern economies were, like the Neolithic and Iron Age economies, dependent on human and draft animals' strength and abilities. However, technical development in mills, navigational instruments, and the information network provided by the printing press and postal system had changed societies and economies. So had the military states, with their high ambitions in controlling wealth and

humans. Large-scale production in shipyards, mines, and manufactures existed to fulfil the states' requests and early capitalism raided the world for wealth; still the dominant household mode of production is essential for questions about gender and work. In the Nordic countries, about 90 per cent of the population lived in the countryside.

Historical demography has been immensely important for a better understanding of peoples' lives in this period. The early modern states' local, regional, and central bureaucracies have left long series of protocols and documents that are now to be found in archives. From the 1960s onwards, historians have used church records and censuses to reconstruct families, including age at marriage, number of children, space between births and rates of births, deaths, infant mortality, and migration. Thanks to this research, historians have since the 1970/1980s based their studies on the fact that in north-west Europe the married couple consisted of two adults, married when she was twenty-six, he twenty-eight — on average — after spending years as youths in service in households other than their parent's. She would give birth to six children; three or four would grow up. In their sixties the couple would retire and their eldest son or daughter if they had no sons, would take over the farm. The household would hire a young workforce, servants if they could afford them, and in northern Europe one or two servants, a girl and a boy, would be normal for medium-sized farms.¹

The origin of this marriage pattern has been explained in many ways, ranging from inheritance laws to population growth in north-west Europe and the lack of land.² The problem is of course that we have no relevant

¹ See Hajnal 1982. For Norway Sogner 1990.

² For a recent summary of some explanations in Moor and Zanden 2010, 1–33.

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similar statistical data from the Middle Ages that could provide convincing figures of age at marriage and number of children. The figures that have been given to prove a lower marriage-age in the Middle Ages are based on the examination of the 'skeletal population' from some cemeteries and hypotheses about higher mortality rates.³ An argument for a similar marriage-age in the Middle Ages as in the early modern period is found in figures of female servants in English manors in the fourteenth century, but lacking evidence of age — female servants could be another type of service than the life-cycle servants in the early modern period.

Local history has also been of equal importance for the studies of early modern household modes of production, especially in Norway. Inspired by Marc Bloch and *Société féodale* (first given as lectures in Oslo 1929 and printed in Oslo 1931),⁴ the Institute for Local History encouraged studies of communities all over Norway. Since then, almost all of the four hundred Norwegian municipalities have financed local history and farm and family genealogies (*gards- og slektshistorie*) from the earliest times to present. Based on local knowledge of resources and landscape combined with solid studies of all written sources such as church records, tax lists, court records, and censuses, local history has formed a basis for further studies in gender and work. However, the genre has been criticized for not making women in the past visible. In the 1980s the questions of women's history led to criticism of the language in the farm and family genealogies. The authors, often trained historians, had listed only male farmers, even if widows ran the farms for decades on their own. Ironical comments abounded about the lonely male farmers in these stories, who 'had' six children and four cows seemingly without any female input.⁵ The critical questions and suggestions for better approaches produced results, not only in local history but also in historical overviews. A solid study of Norwegian economic history was published in 1979. In their book on the economic history of Norway, the historians Ståle Dyrvik and Stein Tveite pointed to gendered divisions of labour as the driving force behind economic growth in the period. Gendered division of labour allowed both a more extensive and intensive use of resources, at times when pressure on available land due to population growth combined with a demand in the European market for products from the North.⁶

The interest in social history and the history of mentalities in the 1980s opened the way for new studies on court records with a special concern for what such

sources could reveal about men and women's actions and arguments in the past. Studies not only with a household perspective, but also with gender perspectives engaged in questions of power, agency, and oppression.⁷ In short, women became as interesting as men for historians. Probably the rise of female historians with new questions to answer in their studies of the past also helped change the way early modern Norwegian history was written.

Since then, studies of early modern Norwegian society and economy have been gendered. Broadly speaking, depending on the historian's interests, the knowledge or notion of household structure and the importance of women's work have been widely treated in articles and books on early modern history for audiences within and outside academia.⁸ This is also a Nordic trend. At Uppsala University, the *Gender and Work* project, led by Professor Maria Ågren, has gained wide interest for its work on verb phrases in court records used as sources of knowledge about the gendered division of work.⁹ The far-reaching consequences are that even 'male' fields such as military history are written with an awareness of gender.¹⁰ In other words — the history of men has also been gendered. The notion of the importance of men as the workforce is of course not new. Both the lack of a male workforce during wars and the return of the male workforce during peace was emphasized in Eli Heckscher's book on the Swedish economy from 1935.¹¹ There is a long-standing general agreement among Nordic early modern historians about periodization in Nordic history in pre- and post-1720 (end of the Great Nordic War). There were six wars between Denmark-Norway and Sweden in 1560–1720, and then peace lasted (almost) until 1807 and the Napoleonic Wars. War and peace obviously had huge impacts on both men and women, and historians have been, and remain, aware of this.

Explaining Growth and Adjustments

As mentioned above, Norwegian historians have analysed gendered divisions of labour as the driving force for economic growth in the period. They regard gendered division of labour as nothing new, but as an

3 Benedictow 1993.

4 Bloch 1931.

5 Tranberg 1986; Marthinsen 1986.

6 Dyrvik and others 1979, 246–48.

7 Sandvik 2005.

8 Sogner 1996, 128–45, 217–18.

9 GAW Gender and Work <<https://gaw.hist.uu.se/>> [accessed 3 February 2025].

10 Sjögren 2008, 36 and 71–72 discusses two texts on masculinities: Mats Hallenberg, 'De vilda vasarna och 1500-talets aggressiva manlighetsideal', *Ad Familiares: Tidskrift för sällskapet för renässans och barockstudier*, 2003–2004 and Mikael Karlsson, 'Den manliga karolinen. Mandighetsidealet i den karolinska armeén', *Karolinska Förbundets Årsbok*, 2000.

11 Heckscher 1935.

established work pattern that could be intensified if needed. Historians could study this process closely because of the early modern source material. Gendered division of work enabled a doubling of the Norwegian population between 1660 to 1800, from about 440,000 to 880,000. This argument is based on the fact that in 1660, all farms that had been laid waste after the plague in 1349 were back in use again. Only 3 per cent of land in Norway is deemed arable. Hence, doubling the population afforded resources and incomes from other sources. Exports from fisheries, forestry, and mining provided incomes for households to buy grain. Seasonal variation made it possible for men to both take part in commercial winter fisheries and to plough and harvest their farms during spring, summer, and autumn. Such seasonal engagement was only possible because women took care of the farms during winter. With more intense engagement in the export trades during spring, summer, and autumn during the eighteenth century, more responsibility for the agricultural part of the household economy fell on women all year round.

Mountain areas and woodland for animal husbandry were also used more intensively. These resources were also based on a gendered division of labour. Women took cattle, goats, and sheep to summer farms, some at 1000 m above sea level, and made butter and cheese. Young men drove cattle and horses to mountain meadows and valleys to fatten during summer, and to markets and fairs in autumn. With animals away from the home farm, all the surrounding grassland was spared for haymaking. A lack of fodder for long winters was critical; in fact, fodder was a scarcity in early modern husbandry.

Equipment for agriculture in this period, such as ploughs and spades, has long been used as a source for rural history.¹² The geographical difference in rural material culture in Europe has an impact on how we understand gender and work. There are obvious differences between agriculture on Danish and German farms with heavy ploughs dragged by two or four oxen, and Norwegian and Swedish farms with just a few acres where a single horse dragged the light Nordic plough, often made without an iron share.¹³ In many areas of the North, the spade took over from the light plough. The combination of small farms, stony land, and lack of fodder for a horse, has been used to explain the turn from ploughs to spades along the western coast of Norway in the eighteenth century. Inventories from these areas normally list five spades, one for each adult, including women. Spading the acre, normally not more than five

dekar,¹⁴ could be done in a week with all spades going. Spading combined with manure resulted in higher yields than in other parts of Norway.

Gendering agriculture as 'male' because of the upper-body strength required to drive oxen obviously refers to Continental plough-agriculture. A successful year on a farm depends on more than tilling the land in spring. For the many tasks that had to be done during a year, a household perspective is fruitful. However, using a gender perspective to look into the household to see how the tasks were organized can be enlightening. The household perspective also is a reminder that households are more than just production sites of grain and butter. Household perspectives also include care, upbringing, and socialization — tasks that have also been fruitfully studied in a gendered perspective.

Explaining Care

Historical demography is also the main entrance for studies and hypotheses about care in early modern history. Family reconstructions based on church records show the number of children and also the intervals between births. Historians have documented two years as the average interval.

Intervals between births are important facts in the discussion about care for infants. In the 1970s some historians claimed that women in this period did not give their infants breast, and that unsuitable nourishment, such as cow or goat milk, explained the high infant mortality resulting from gastro-intestinal infections.¹⁵ Declining infant mortality was explained by the authorities' propaganda for breastfeeding. However, the intervals between births in a time without secure preventives could not be explained in any other way than as an effect of breastfeeding. Upper-class women, who used hired nurses for breastfeeding their children, gave birth without these intervals.¹⁶ Breastfeeding, especially during nights when hormone production is strongest, postpones women's fertility after a birth.¹⁷ Therefore the space between births shown by the family reconstruction based on church records shows that breastfeeding was normal earlier, and not a result of the authorities' enlightenment project. This does not mean that care for infants was easy for hardworking women and early modern households. Infants' wellbeing relies on many factors, nutrition, cleaning, warmth, and general care; factors that included solid houses and

14 One *dekar* is 1000 m².

15 Shorter 1977.

16 Sogner 1990, 59.

17 Liestøl and others 1988, 423–34.

12 Valen-Senstad 1964.

13 Myrdal 1999.

enough firewood and therefore involved the whole household. However, studies of the decline in infant mortality have also strengthened the hypothesis that the mothers' health was of immense importance for the infants' strength, and that the decline in infant mortality in the nineteenth century could be an effect of the mothers' improved health caused by more and better nutrition.¹⁸

The discussion about care in historical perspectives can be related to the discussion about the history of childhood. Aries's and later Stone and Shorter's theses about childhood as a modern invention, was met with heavy protest from medieval historians and ethnographers.¹⁹ One of Stone and Shorter's arguments was a lack of feeling for children in the past. Women's heavy workload was used as an argument for insufficient care. Turning this argument round, I would say that regarding the heavy workload — it shows the enormous effort taken to provide care, when families managed to bring up three or four of six siblings. The more we know about women's work in the past, combined with our knowledge of housing, weather, water, wars, and sickness, underlines how historians ought rather to be overwhelmed with the amount of care that households, and especially women, managed to give in the past.

Explaining the Jack of All Trades — and Socialization

A combination of household perspectives and gender perspectives is also important for explaining the upbringing and socialization of children and youths. Studies of gender and work in the Nordic countries have proven that people were Jacks of all trades (Nordic ethnologists have used the concept *mangesyslere* since the 1970s). A farmer was also a fisherman, a smith, a lumberjack. His wife would fish, chop wood, weave, make butter, care, and teach children to read. The lack of professions and specialization in the Nordic countries compared to the English countryside has led the aforementioned *Gender and Work* project in Uppsala to look for other sources for men and women's work than occupation titles. Rather, with the work mentioned *en-passant* in court records the project concludes that what they find is a countryside with multiple working households.

An upbringing aimed at fulfilling the roles in this economy meant mastering a scope of different tasks. Both men and women took part in the upbringing and socialization. Along the coast, boys had to learn from men both how to farm and to fish. Girls had to learn

from women how to spin, weave, farm, cook, and care. Mothers and fathers, masters and mistresses taught their children and workers of both sexes the routines and economy of the household, more or less explicitly, with the power to lead and punish.²⁰ The life-cycle type of servant, typical for the north-west European household formation system has been regarded as part of this upbringing. It was part of a double interest: the household needed a young, cheap, industrious, and obedient workforce to help with the many tasks in early modern households. The youths could shift between households and were not bound to one master for more than a year. Both boys and girls were servants and spent several years away from their parent's home before marriage. Both boys and girls therefore gained experience and often learned more than they could have learned at home. Cottars' children became servants at a younger age, and stayed longer in service than farmers' children. In support of a view of service as not just a burden on young people who had to leave their parent's home, is the fact that farmers' children also went into service. This could be explained by the general restriction in the servant-law of 1754 on the number of children parents could keep at home. However, the many complaints from civil servants combined with censuses and other sources show that the law failed to push young people into service. Probably the pull-effect of meeting other young people, earning some money, and seeing and learning how other households managed could be a similar driving force for going into service. Girls and boys, young women and men even emigrated to the Netherlands for work.²¹

Boys had more opportunities than girls did. In towns a boy could become an apprentice in a workshop, girls could only be servants. The few Latin schools were only for boys. Boys were conscripted for military service, and entered the military about the age of twenty, some even younger in the navy. A basic equality in education can be found in the rudimentary elementary schools in Norway from about 1741, where teachers stayed for some weeks in a district, and boys and girls got the same training in reading and learning the Catechism.

Discussing Worth and Law Practice: Agency, Authority, Ability, and Diversity

A gender perspective on households affords a discussion of power and worth. In this last section, I will give a

¹⁸ Fure 2002.

¹⁹ Ariés 1960; Hanawalt 1993; Wilson 1984, 181–98.

²⁰ Kong Christian Den Femtis Norske Lov (1687) 6-5-6 and 7.

²¹ Sogner 1994.

summary of my own research on this question.²² My argument is that the economic and social importance of girls and women's contribution to the household economy had an impact on how they regarded themselves and how they were regarded, and due to preserved court records from this period, it is possible to compare the subjection prescribed in law with local actions and disputes. The court records from the local courts, 'ting' are in fact the first possibilities we have to study gender as power in ordinary daily life for common people. Nothing similar was written in the Nordic Middle Ages. Early modern historians therefore have both the law and court records and church records that can be used as sources to study how law was used. Several discussions on women's agency, authority, and ability could be outlined here. I shall just give a brief introduction to my research concerning agency, ability, and authority.

In the small Norwegian towns, where about a tenth of the population lived, credit was essential for all trades and it is no surprise that court cases about debt and payments fill *tingbøkene*, the court protocols. In Christiania (today Oslo), women were parties to about one-third of the cases. Despite the law giving a husband the right to withdraw from his wife's and household members' contracts, thereby undermining economic actions separate from himself, nearly no one used this right. Wives entered the weekly court-meetings, admitted the contracts, and promised to pay the debts. Neither did the judges refer to the actual paragraph in the law. Women, young, married, or widowed, seem to have been expected to keep their word and pay their debts. An explanation for husbands not using the law could be that in an economy based on credit it would be very unwise to withdraw from contracts. The judges, who were merchants and only in court one day a week, likewise probably had no interest in people running away from debts. Women did therefore take part in daily trade, and the words from the old Norwegian Town Laws from the 1270s 'All shall keep their words, 'konor sem karlar' (women as men) seem to be the long-lasting ethos.²³

To keep one's word was also what every young person, in towns and countryside, girls as boys, had to do when entering into service. Annual contracts were serious matters regardless of gender. Court records give clear evidence of women's, young or adult, ability

to enter into contracts about work and payment. The household economy afforded a flexible pool of reliable young workers of both sexes.

Restrictions on women's legal capacity then mainly concerned land and inheritance. Inheritance was a major means of transferring wealth within families, and a separate section of the medieval law, *Arvebolken*, regulated who could inherit and when. Sisters inherited half of what their brothers did, and according to the 1604 revision of the law, their husband or guardian should govern their inheritance. However, a husband's legal capacity over land his wife had 'brought into marriage' was also restricted. He could not sell, pawn, or transfer the land without her witnessed (*vitterlig*) consent. The 1687 revision of the law weakened the importance of the wife's consent, and thereby gave husbands a strong legal capacity over the whole estate. But studies of land-transfer contracts from the first half of the eighteenth century reveal that the old formula 'With my wife's yes and consent' were still used, and probably read aloud in the local courts, the *tings*, before the documents were signed by both parties.²⁴ I have estimated that about 25 per cent of Norwegian couples lived on farms that came from the wife's side: widows brought farms into marriage, and the eldest daughter would inherit the farm if no sons or son's son were present. The 1801 census shows that about 15 per cent of farmers marrying for the first time, married widows, and local studies show that about 14–17 per cent of farms were transferred to daughters or sons-in-law.²⁵

To keep one's word, to be reliable, trustworthy, was a characteristic for both men and women, and not a gendered asset. This is clearly proven by the fact that women were witnesses in court, took oaths, and even swore on a person's testimony as trustworthy, three, six, or twelve women together, in criminal court cases — the number depending on how serious the case was.

Women's legal capacity and experience from contracts and courts during their lifetime was an obvious precondition for keeping a household during widowhood. Widows could remarry or retire and let the young generation take over the farm or the trade, but remaining a widow was also an option. To be the head of household afforded knowledge of relations with authorities in such matters as tax, land rent, and other obligations. This entailed knowledge of the relevant documents, contracts, deeds, and landmarks, borders, extensions of land, and rights. Women held authority in households as wives together with their husbands, but when widowed, the law advised them to get help

22 Sandvik 2005.

23 Friðriksdóttir and others 2023: *Magnus Lagabøters bylov*, 7 (Kjöpebolken) — 6: 'þAt er nu þui nest at ver | biorguinir menn verðum miok uið kaup at lifa. en í bō varom | skulu aller frealser menn oc fultiða raða kaupum sínum sva konor Sem | karlar' (Since we townsmen shall live by trade, all free men shall keep their words, women as men).

24 Sandvik 2005, 116.

25 Sandvik 2005, 115. For discussion on this theme for Sweden: Ågren 2009.

from a guardian — however they could choose this guardian themselves. The many court cases with widows involved reveal their capacities and their knowledge of law and legal procedure, with or without guardians.²⁶

Diversity, marital as well as social, is essential for discussing gender. Agency, ability, and authority can also be studied in a social, economic household context. Social and economic position has given women authority and power over many men. At the very top of society in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, noble widows could hold fiefs and be the regional governor. Norway's wealthiest person in the sixteenth century was a noble widow who owned six hundred farms. Such positions for women ended with the coming of absolutism in 1660, when the nobility lost their political privileges. However, privileges did continue. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the government gave burghers and industries economic privileges, including the widows' lifetime. Therefore, wealthy widows who owned ironworks, forests, sawmills, trading houses, workshops, and substantial farms top many tax lists and are visible in the first nominative census (year 1801). Social positions regardless of gender were very visible in a society organized by privilege. So was poverty. The same lists and census reveal poor widows and single mothers earning a living from hard work and

some communal relief. The household-gender approach obviously needs a third social-economic dimension. However, this dimension makes women's authority, ability, and agency even more visible and important, and underlines the importance of household-economy as a source of poverty and wealth.

Conclusion

For understanding the Nordic past, a household-gender perspective has been an eye-opener for early modernists. Gender division of labour explains how economic growth was possible. Demographic analyses have revealed the vital data necessary to discuss household formation including care and socialization. Discussions of agency in a gender perspective is possible, given the preserved court records from this period. Diversity becomes clear by adding marital and social-economic dimensions to the household-gender analyses, avoiding gender generalizations and instead emphasizing the impact of privilege in this period. Gendering the Nordic past also means incorporating natural and environmental preconditions into analyses of care and upbringing below the Arctic Circle, and in doing so trying to include empathy in our analyses of how life was then.

²⁶ Sandvik 2019, 197–210.

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15. Dissolving Dichotomies

On the Necessity of Integrating Saami, Nordic, and Feminist Gender Archaeology

Gender (Norw.: *kjønn*, meaning both sex and gender) emerged as a prominent issue in Norwegian archaeology from the 1970s and 1980s, and feminist and gender perspectives were quite influential in the thinking about social identities in general. This included questions about ethnicity and cultural identity, which sat at the core of archaeology focusing on Saami indigenous groups, which was simultaneously developing. The intertwining of the two movements is denoted by a seminal article for Saami archaeology entitled ‘Var de alle nordmenn?’ (‘Were they all Norwegians?’), first published in 1983.¹ The title paraphrases the heading of an influential conference on gender perspectives in archaeology held in Norway in 1979 (although only published in 1987), *Were They All Men?*² (Norw.: *Var de alle menn?*). Researchers at the University of Tromsø have been central in developing both feminist gender and Saami archaeology since the 1980s.³ However, apart from some critique of previous studies in Saami contexts,⁴ very few researchers have considered Saami archaeology through a gender and feminist lens beyond noting or discussing the presence of women or perceived female objects in settlement, burial, and deposition contexts.⁵

This lack of interaction is all the more conspicuous as there have been comparable debates about social

identity and its material cultural expressions within both fields, with increasing focus on the complexity of such identities,⁶ sometimes articulated as intersectionality concerning gender,⁷ and hybridization or creolization concerning ethnic groups.⁸ Both approaches aim to both identify women or specific ethnic or cultural identities in the archaeological material, and to theorize the ambiguity of all archaeological evidence and what our categories mean for how we do archaeology.⁹ Feminist gender perspectives have been perceived as rendering the archaeology too political and not objective enough,¹⁰ which mirrors equivalent statements about Saami archaeology. These are frequently uttered by people who are themselves in privileged positions where they are not affected by the politics of a ‘non-political’ archaeology.¹¹ In both contexts, it is a relevant reminder that *no* archaeology is apolitical. An atheoretical gender or Saami archaeology, or the ‘simply archaeology’ sometimes called for, would still imply a political stance of protecting the *status quo*. Internal attempts to depoliticize the approaches by avoiding particular theoretical terms or frameworks that are perceived as especially political (e.g., ethnicity, feminism), have the same ramifications. Archaeologist Ericka Engelstad has stated that not theorizing gender in a feminist framework also risks maintaining gender archaeology as a fringe

¹ A. Schanche and Olsen 1983; 1985.

² Bertelsen and others 1987.

³ e.g., Olsen 1984; A. Schanche 1986; Jørgensen and Olsen 1988; Engelstad 1991; Olsen and Kobylinski 1991; Storli 1994; Damm 2000; A. Schanche 2000; Solli 2002; Hansen and Olsen 2014; Engelstad 2007, and many more.

⁴ Valen 1996; Torsetnes 2004.

⁵ e.g., Storli 1994; Mulk 1994; A. Schanche 2000; Spangen 2010; Zachrisson 2014; though see Hildre 2002 below for a notable exception.

⁶ e.g., Damm 1991; Spangen 2005; Bruun 2007; Sørensen 2013b, 403–04; Moen 2019.

⁷ Crenshaw 1989; Weldon 2008.

⁸ Eriksen 1993; Bhabha 1994.

⁹ e.g., Schanche 1989; Olsen 2004; Conkey 2005, 25, 28; Scott 1986; 2010.

¹⁰ Scott 1986; Wylie 2003; Engelstad 2007.

¹¹ Ojala 2009, 47, 54; Spangen 2016, 26.

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topic and leaving the otherwise useful analytical category of gender a dead and under-theorized end.¹² The same could be said for ethnicity and cultural categories. However, despite heavy theorizing within both fields, neither is fully integrated into Nordic archaeology, and they are still largely considered niche interests.¹³

Curiously, this apparently goes for practitioners within the two fields with regard to each other too, reflecting a general tendency to prioritize one intersection above others in a 'hierarchy of loyalties'.¹⁴ To some extent, this may be due to an understanding of these topics as separate issues in archaeology and a sense of a limited capacity to fight a multi-front 'war'. However, the issues at stake are so interlaced that they can hardly be considered in separation, with one aspect of past social organization a required precondition to understand the other. Consequently, I propose that integrating Saami, Nordic, and feminist gender archaeology is not only beneficial but necessary to achieve a better idea of the social networks, power relations, processes, and worldviews in the Nordic past. Several dichotomies and black-boxed categories¹⁵ have to be overcome to achieve this. One is the prevailing, if challenged, understanding of Saami and Norse/Germanic/Scandinavian groups (sometimes dubbed 'agricultural groups') as homogenous opposites that interacted in standardized fashions. Together with a view of Saami archaeology as politically motivated, this notion has led to a lingering understanding of studies of Saami pasts as something that is unrelated to the general ('neutral') studies of Nordic pasts. Similar notions concern gender archaeology, maintaining a dichotomy between this approach and Nordic archaeology in general. An integration will take advantage of the theoretical overlaps and benefits of joint efforts for Saami and feminist gender archaeology to promote more complex understandings of the Nordic past.

The Saami and Saami Archaeology

The Saami are the indigenous people of northern Fennoscandia. It is generally accepted that the terms *Finnr*, *Fid̄r*, and *Finni* in medieval historical sources such as the sagas refer to the Saami,¹⁶ but the development of Saami ethnicity has been much discussed. In particular, theories about Saami origins have been debated, shifting between associating Saami culture with Stone

Age ancestors in northern Fennoscandia to poorly supported but highly influential theories about late Saami migration into Scandinavian territories in the early modern period.¹⁷ In current Saami archaeology, ethnic identities are usually understood to emerge from a perceived cultural unity in meeting with other groups that are identified as culturally different from oneself.¹⁸ This focus on (self-)identification lingers in theories about ethnicity, but there is a vast body of research that explores the complexities of such processes and how they are reflected in the archaeological record.¹⁹ From classifying specific archaeological features as ethnic markers, there has been a realization that any material expression may serve as or grow into being a more or less conscious identity marker, depending on the societal context in question.²⁰ This underlines the floating qualities of identity, the longevity of material culture, and its ability to take on new significance beyond the initial meaning at the time and place of production and use.²¹ Thus, material expressions may strengthen and perpetuate individual and group identities. Yet, they are also exchangeable over time depending on, among other things, the context and combinations they appear in at any given time. This can be described in various theoretical terms, for instance through the concepts of territorialization and deterritorialization as used in assemblage thinking.²² This understanding of ethnic identities as processes producing a variety of expressions is important to avoid falling into the cultural-historical trap of equating certain kinds of material culture with bounded cultural entities and ethnic groups. The distribution of specific archaeological features is still seen as an important source of information about group identities in the past, but with far more attention to various complexities and using triangulation with other sources to ensure contextualized interpretations.²³

Based on archaeological and linguistic evidence, a common identity is thought to have emerged among groups of hunter-gatherers in northern Fennoscandia in the last millennium BC, developing into a specifically Saami ethnicity before AD 500. This is based on, amongst other things, the evident existence of the endonym *sábmme* and *sábmelaš* in Saami before its division into several languages such as South and North Saami, which again

12 Scott 1986; Engelstad 2007, 225.

13 e.g., Olsen 2004; Moen 2019.

14 Suleri 1992, 763.

15 Latour 1987, 2–3, 130–31; 1999.

16 Aalto 2010, 116; Wang 2023.

17 Ojala 2009; Hansen and Olsen 2014, ch. 2.

18 Barth 1969; Odner 1983.

19 e.g., Hodder 1982; Eriksen 1993; Jenkins 1997; Jones 1997; Díaz-Andreu and others 2005.

20 e.g., Henriksen 1996; Jones 1997.

21 Kopytoff 1986; Gosden and Marshall 1999; Spangen 2005; 2016.

22 DeLanda 2016; Jervis 2018.

23 e.g., Hakenbeck 2007; Røstad 2021.

reflect the diversity within Saami culture.²⁴ The historically known Saami settlement areas (Sápmi) stretch from mid-Norway and mid-Sweden through northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola peninsula in Russia, and covered areas farther south in the Iron and Middle Ages.²⁵ This encompasses a vast geographical area of the Nordic countries and varied natural landscapes. The Saami are stereotypically associated with nomadic reindeer herding, but this is a quite recent development in only some Saami communities, who have otherwise had different economic adaptations, including hunting, fishing, gathering, husbandry, and agriculture. Products from the Saami have been important sources of trade and income for neighbouring groups.²⁶ Thus, despite some common linguistic, material, religious, and other characteristics, Saami groups have had diverse cultural adaptations and expressions. Consequently, we should also expect variations in the archaeological traces of these Saami groups, not least over time.²⁷

Despite this recognition of intragroup and chronological variation, we lack detailed knowledge about the variations in individual Saami identities. For instance, early research within Saami archaeology tended to stereotype Saami groups as egalitarian bands throughout history, while historical sources and grave-goods rather suggest that there were stratified Saami societies in the Middle Ages.²⁸ While acknowledging common ethnic and group identities in the past and the likely expression of these through material culture such as dress ornaments,²⁹ we should keep in mind that your position within a given Saami group at a given time in history would determine much of your identity and conceivably also the individual material expressions of this status.

Saami history and archaeology developed in the 1970s and 1980s as part of a protest movement and cultural revitalization after centuries of oppression and assimilation.³⁰ There has been opposition, and the burden of proof has been placed on the minority side to prove that archaeological remains could be Saami, while the articulation of (implicit) majority identities in archaeology ('our ancestors', 'the first Norwegians') is rarely questioned. This has forced a certain 'strategic essentialism',³¹ i.e., the construction of a stereotypical and homogenous Saami identity that could be recognized in

the archaeological material as an opposition to a Norse, Germanic, or Scandinavian identity. This construction built on observable contrasts in the archaeological material in areas known from historical sources to be primarily Saami and Norse respectively in the Iron and Middle Ages. For instance, and somewhat simplified, burial mounds and cairns and typical Norse settlements with longhouses can be found primarily along the outer coast of northern Norway up to Tromsø, while they are absent in inner fjords and the inland, as well as farther north.³² These areas of 'absence' have consequently been interpreted as mainly Saami territories, in medieval written sources named *Finnmørk*.³³ Over the last fifty years, archaeologists have identified a range of previously ignored cultural heritage sites in said territories that are now considered typical for Saami settlements, for instance scree graves, circular turf hut foundations, slab-lined pits for marine mammal oil extraction, and certain singular and row-organized hearths.³⁴

Studies of Women in Saami Archaeology

While there is a conspicuous lack of pronounced feminist theory or gender approaches in Saami archaeology, important studies have been carried out where the presence and role of Saami women are discussed. However, these studies often investigate women to shed light on other aspects of Saami society or the archaeological record, rather than to explore gender roles in Saami society *per se*. One example is the association of a specific type of hearth and hut floor structure with Saami and female presence. Ethnographic and historical sources describe how the traditional round Saami tent or hut floorplan was divided into zones with different practical purposes and use or access for people with different social statuses, which is also the case in other circumpolar contexts.³⁵ The area behind the hearth has often been demarcated by a larger slab or a gathering of stones, referred to as the *boaššu*³⁶ stone(s). Some seventeenth–eighteenth-century sources describe the *boaššu* area as male, forbidden for women, and the area where the men, including the *noaidi*,³⁷ kept

24 Jørgensen and Olsen 1988; Korhonen 1988; Odner 1983; Aikio 2012; Hansen and Olsen 2014.

25 e.g., Zachrisson 1997; Bergstøl 2008.

26 e.g., Hansen 1990; Bergman and Edlund 2016.

27 Hansen and Olsen 2014; 2022.

28 Hansen and Olsen 2014, 116–17.

29 Hodder 1982; Sørensen 2013a.

30 Eidheim 1997; Hansen and Olsen 2014, 5–6.

31 Spivak 1988; Olsen 2001.

32 A. Schanche 1986; Spangen and Arntzen 2020.

33 This denotes a much larger territory than today's Finnmark county.

34 e.g., K. Schanche 1992; Henriksen 1996; A. Schanche 2000; Sommersteth 2009; Hansen and Olsen 2014; Hedman and others 2015.

35 Ränk 1949; Kuoljok 1991.

36 Saami terms are here written in North Sámi unless otherwise stated.

37 Saami ritual specialist.

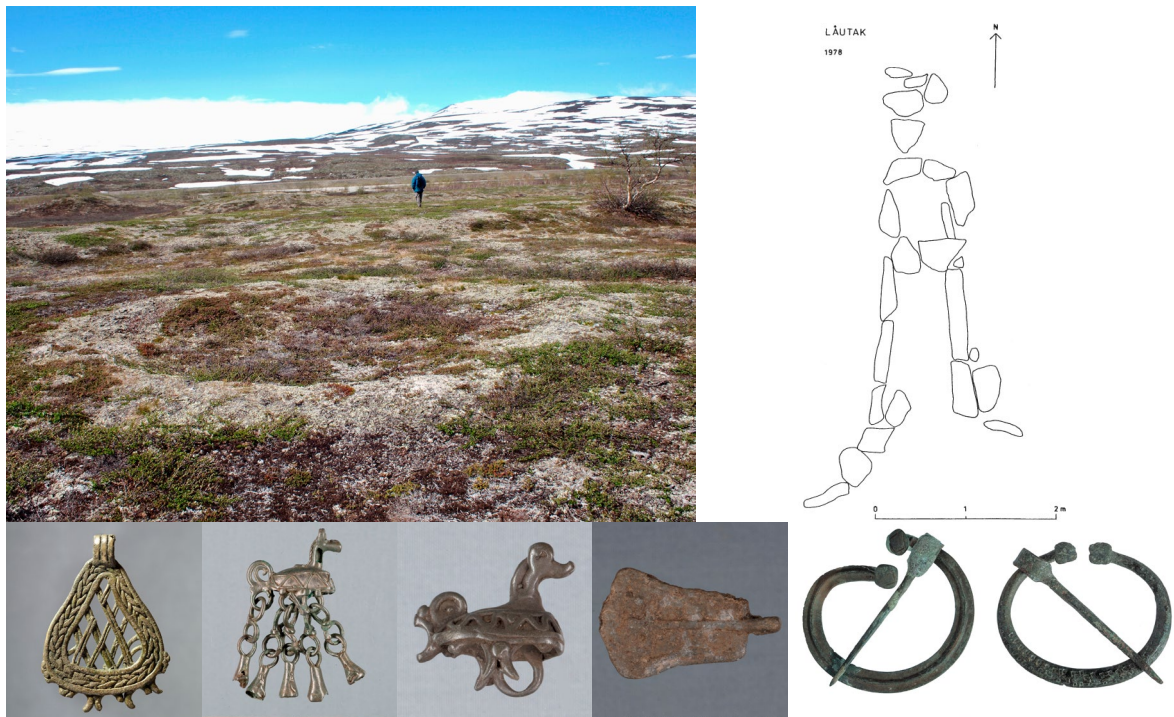


Figure 15.1. Typical Saami structures and objects mentioned in the text. Top left: Stállo turf hut ground. Photo: B. Olsen. Top right: *Geađgebearpmet árran* (NSaa.), a hearth with arms marking the division of the hut floor in spheres and *boaššu* stones at the back of the hut. Drawing: Mulk 1994. Bottom row: Examples of eastern jewellery types commonly found in Saami contexts. Museum numbers from the left: Ts.3301, Ts.15755/1, Ts.15379/1, Ts.15356/1, Ts.4620a, Ts.3038. Photos: The Arctic University Museum of Norway, CC BY-NC-ND 3.0.

their guns and other equipment.³⁸ Similar divisions of the hut floor and ritual depositions and objects in this back area are known from archaeological contexts dating back into the Iron and Middle Ages.³⁹ *Boaššu* stones have also been recorded in so-called *Stállo* hut foundations, foundations for a type of large, round, turf hut from the Viking and Middle Ages, found in rows in the mountainous areas between Norway and Sweden (Fig. 15.1). There is an ongoing debate about the origin and purpose of these houses, especially whether they were used during (Saami) reindeer hunting or reindeer pastoralism (i.e., intensive herding and milking),⁴⁰ although they have also been interpreted as meeting sites for Norse–Saami trade.⁴¹ Archaeologist Inger Storli has argued that the presence of *boaššu* stones in

these contexts would have been meaningless unless there were women present that needed reminding of how far into the hut they could go. Female presence is further corroborated by finds of spindle whorls in these contexts. In addition, historical and ethnographic sources link the structuration of the hut with different types of food, where meat from wild animals was brought in through a small backdoor into the *boaššu* area, while women would handle the milking of the reindeer and other livestock in the area by the front door. Storli's conclusion is that the *Stállo* sites are related to early reindeer pastoralism.⁴² Counterarguments point out that according to historical sources Saami women actually participated in hunts in premodern times, and that the *boaššu* is also described as where men kept their weapons, suggesting it could be important to delineate even if only male hunters were present.⁴³

It is symptomatic of the discussion that it questions the source material and interpretations, but not the underlying theories, such as the structuration of space

³⁸ Ränk 1949 actually refers to one source that says the opposite, i.e., that women were not allowed to use the backdoor through which the meat was brought into the hut, but could go into the *boaššu* area; Jens Kildal in Reuterskiöld 1910, 10, 89.

³⁹ e.g., Mulk 1994; Grydeland 2001; Bergstøl and Reitan 2008; Hansen and Olsen 2014, 59, 222.

⁴⁰ e.g., Bergman and others 2008; Liedgren and Bergman 2009; Sommerseth 2009.

⁴¹ e.g., Kjellström 1983; Aronsson 2020.

⁴² Storli 1993.

⁴³ Hansen 1993; Odner 1993.

in static binary oppositions between men and women.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Storli's interpretation is based on much later ethnographic and historical sources, which can be seen to imply that Saami culture has been uniform and static. There has been a general tendency in Saami archaeology to depend heavily on ethnographic and historical sources in the interpretation of much older archaeological evidence,⁴⁵ resulting in a 'tyranny of the ethnographic record',⁴⁶ where potential socio-cultural change and chronological variations are left less explored. Another issue is the uncritical understanding of spindle whorls as an implicit sign of female presence.⁴⁷ In Norse contexts, spindle whorls mainly appear in graves with biological women, but they do occur in male (weapon) burials too.⁴⁸ To my knowledge, the only spindle whorls found in a Saami scree grave were buried with a biological man.⁴⁹ Yet, the potentially different significance of such finds in the Saami *Stállo* hut contexts is not discussed.

Another interesting study by Inger Storli focuses on eastern jewellery (Fig. 15.1), which tends to be found in female Saami scree graves and on Saami offering sites, and thus seems to signal a Saami identity. However, she finds fourteen cases where eastern jewellery has been found in Late Iron Age Norse burial contexts, some very rich. Storli interprets this as a result of marriages between the Saami and Norse elite.⁵⁰ This is not unlikely and may be supported by recent aDNA studies.⁵¹ Storli's conclusion is that Norse and Saami elites exchanged marriage partners, in this case women.⁵² However, this interesting result has not been followed up with more thorough discussions of the practicalities, female agency, or the socio-cultural results in both societies of such interaction, including the effects on the categorization of material culture and gender roles. Similarly, in Audhild Schanche's highly valuable study of Saami scree graves, female agency is not discussed in regard to eastern jewellery, which is seen as gifts from men (husbands) who traded with parties in the east.⁵³

In her master's thesis from 2002, archaeologist Nina Hildre refreshingly implements feminist and gender theory in a study of grave-goods in scree graves.⁵⁴ She challenges the evolutionist and ethnographically based

understanding of Saami hunter-gatherer societies as inherently egalitarian, and that social differences are necessarily structured according to gender and age. Instead, she argues that, for instance, finds of Early Metal Age (c. 1800 BC–1) bone arrowheads in both male and female scree graves are an expression of a common 'work' identity as hunters, rather than related to sex or gender. Concerning the Late Iron Age and early medieval eastern jewellery in female graves, Hildre questions why women may not themselves have been the traders, expressing this specific female identity through jewellery. Her discussion is based on an understanding of gender roles as relational and shaped depending on several factors, such as subsistence, mobility, territoriality, and social hierarchy, as well as contact networks and relations with neighbouring groups. Furthermore, it is noted that gender identity may have been seen differently from the inside and the outside of the society, which echoes descriptions of how past ethnic identities may have been perceived differently from different perspectives.⁵⁵

Variation as Ritual

These complexities are crucial for understanding and discussing grave-goods and gender association when the archaeological finds cross the borders of our preconceived categories. Archaeologists have frequently interpreted 'unusual' archaeological finds in graves as expressions of gender transgression and 'fringe' identities related to religious and ritual practices and statuses, rather than letting such finds challenge established categories of gendered objects and ethnic idioms.⁵⁶ In Saami or 'mixed' Saami–Norse contexts, variation has repeatedly been interpreted as an expression of a 'shaman' or *noaidi* status for the individual.⁵⁷ One example is a tenth-century inhumation grave at Storslett on Kvaløya, Tromsø, northern Norway. Other burial monuments and settlement traces substantiate that the area was the northernmost concentration of Norse Iron Age settlements along the Atlantic coast.⁵⁸ The burial in question contained common Norse items such as a spindle whorl, hone, iron scissors, and a sickle, as well as bronze and iron ring-shaped objects, four beads on a bronze ring, and another 124 beads in a leather and birch bark container. In addition, the burial contained three different pendants originating in west Finland or Karelia, and three small, interlinked bronze bells.

44 Yates 1989; cf. Valen 1996, 95; Torsetnes 2004, 83–84.

45 e.g., A. Schanche 1993; Berg 2001.

46 Wobst 1978.

47 Mulk 1993.

48 Petersen 1951, 4, 308–09; Rabben 2002, 34.

49 A. Schanche 2000, 223, 322.

50 Storli 1991.

51 Margaryan and others 2020.

52 Storli 1991; 1994, 90, 115; 2006, 36–37.

53 A. Schanche 2000.

54 Hildre 2002.

55 van Dommelen 2002.

56 e.g., Spindler 1983; Arnold 1991.

57 e.g., Price 2002.

58 Spangen and Arntzen 2020.

The burial has been interpreted as female.⁵⁹ Some researchers have maintained that the presence of eastern ornaments indicates that the buried individual had a Saami identity.⁶⁰ Considering the placement in a primarily Norse landscape and the abundance of beads, but also eastern ornaments, others have suggested a hybrid identity.⁶¹

Yet another interpretation is that the objects in the grave indicate an identity as a shaman, because all the objects, beside the beads and iron tools, are claimed to be associated with Saami shamanism, particularly the bells and eastern pendants.⁶² No reference is given for this statement, and it is debatable for several reasons. Firstly, eastern ornaments are related to the Saami in general, not specifically ritual specialists. Secondly, it is true that bronze bells are common finds in north and central Russia,⁶³ where ethnographic sources describe such bells as part of intricate costumes used by shamans in these areas.⁶⁴ However, sources for Saami pre-Christian religion do not mention particular dress or attire used by the *noaidi*, apart from sometimes changing into their best clothes or turning their clothes inside out.⁶⁵ Furthermore, the *noaidi* is often referred to as a 'Saami shaman', but it is debated whether this is an accurate definition of the Saami word and practice.⁶⁶ The word shaman originates from Tungu-speaking people in Siberia, but it has been translated and used as a vernacular and academic umbrella term for a wide variety of practices. The chronological and geographical variation in these practices undermines Mircea Eliade's attempts to define an archetype for a 'true' shaman.⁶⁷ Yet precisely such untenable generalizations are implicitly invoked when comparisons of attire such as bells are used to identify a 'shaman' identity across cultural-historical contexts. Admittedly, bronze bells of the same kind as at Storslett have been found at Saami offering sites, but so have a range of other object types that are not particularly associated with ritual specialists.⁶⁸ For the grave at Storslett, which is found in a Norse context, it would be equally relevant to note that similar bells have been found on Gotland and in graves in the Viking Age town of Birka in Sweden, where they are clearly associated with child burials.⁶⁹ Thus, we cannot exclude

that the person buried at Storslett was a ritual specialist with (part) Saami identity, but the bells could equally suggest that a child was also buried in the grave.

Another famous example of a ritual interpretation is grave no. 9 at the eleventh–twelfth-century burial field at Vivalen, Dalarna, Sweden. The definition of these graves as Saami, thus indicating Saami presence in the Late Iron Age, has been a hot topic in harrowing court cases about land rights in this region. In these court cases, archaeologists have been summoned to testify about the longevity of Saami presence based on recorded cultural heritage sites. Both issues of the frequency of archaeological projects, representativity and changes in interpretations over time, and issues concerning how to identify specifically (South) Saami heritage sites have challenged the legal need for clear-cut definitions and created tension within the academic and local communities.⁷⁰

I understand the particular burial style at Vivalen as a local South Saami cultural expression. In grave 9, a biological man was buried accompanied by both 'male' objects, like a belt decorated with eastern bronze settings, and with more than forty glass beads, a silver brooch, a needle case, and a small knife, 'which in Nordic culture should have defined a woman'.⁷¹ In addition, he wore a linen tunic with long band-decorated sleeves that has parallels in Norse female graves in Birka. Based on this apparent gender transgression, it has been suggested that the man was a shaman, or, in South Saami, a *nåejte*.⁷² This interpretation may perhaps be seen as an integration of Saami and Nordic archaeology, but it makes an unsustainable leap in, on the one hand, defining the burials as Saami, while on the other hand defining what is female or male based on evidence from non-Saami, Norse graves. Furthermore, while there is ethnographic evidence from Siberian contexts for people dressing in clothes of other genders for ritual or healing purposes,⁷³ this has not been identified in the recorded Saami traditions.⁷⁴ The interpretation leads to the deduction that two children at Vivalen were also shamans: an eleven- to twelve-year-old boy buried with a bead necklace and a belt with a silver brooch, and a five-year-old girl buried with a knife, a possible strike-a-light, a flint, and an arrowhead. Both assemblages are considered mixes of female and male attire.⁷⁵ Historical sources from north Sápmi indicate that children could

59 Sjøvold 1974, 159.

60 Munch 2013.

61 Bruun 2007, 52–53.

62 Sandmo and others 1994, 30–32, 198.

63 As well as Finland, the eastern Baltics, and south-east of Lake Ladoga, Serning 1956, 50.

64 e.g., Dobzhanskaya and others 2022.

65 Bäckman and Hultkrantz 1978, 78–79.

66 Rydving 2003, 17.

67 Eliade 1964; Harvey 2003.

68 Serning 1956; Salmi and others 2018.

69 Gräslund 1973, 164–69.

70 Bull 2004; Ojala 2009, 155–60 with references; Brännström 2020.

71 Zachrisson 2014, 249, my translation.

72 Zachrisson 1997, 149; 2014, 249–50.

73 e.g., Bogoras 1904, 450.

74 Bäckman and Hultkrantz 1978, 16: 78–79; cf. Solli 2002, 149 (the reference given by Solli does not correspond to such information in Bäckman and Hultkrantz 1978).

75 Zachrisson 1997; 2014, 250.

be designated a role as future ritual specialists,⁷⁶ but I question if this interpretation rather reflects a general tendency to explain unfamiliar archaeological remains, particularly in Saami contexts, as ritual.⁷⁷

To my knowledge, we have no historical descriptions or drawings of Saami dress before the sixteenth century and few archaeological finds beyond metal ornaments. Thus, we have little information about regional variation and gendered traits in costumes before this. Regional variation in Norse dress is also little explored, in part due to the marginalization of textile archaeology, which has been considered a niche interest of mainly female archaeologists.⁷⁸ The Late Iron Age–early medieval Skjoldehamn costume illustrates the problem. It was found in an unusual bog burial in an area where both Saami and Norse groups resided at the time. Beyond much later ethnographic parallels, there is little evidence to inform us whether the well-preserved clothes are Saami or Norse (or something else) and whether they belonged to a male or a female.⁷⁹ Generally, interpretations of identity based on dress are unreliable beyond general trends within a cultural context or region, and while more detailed studies are needed, they are not always possible to prioritize. This leaves, for instance, eastern jewellery as a shorthand for Saami identity. We need to challenge such black-boxed categories, though with care, so as to not, yet again, discredit signs of Saami presence in the past.

Dissolving Dichotomies

As described above, historical, archaeological, and linguistic sources substantiate that there were groups in northern Fennoscandia who considered themselves to have a shared Saami ethnic identity from the Early Iron Age onwards. This identity was likely articulated in contrast to neighbouring Norse or other mainly agricultural groups, though not necessarily with entirely the same cultural expressions in different Saami regions and communities (hence the variations in the Saami language) or as strict mutual oppositions concerning livelihoods or other cultural traits. There are many interesting studies of the interactions between these groups and the importance of these contacts to, for instance, state development.⁸⁰ However, the initial political necessity in the 1980s of demonstrating a distinguishable Saami presence in the archaeological

material resulted in somewhat simplistic descriptions of the Saami and the Norse or Scandinavians as two opposite and homogenous entities. On a local and regional, not to mention individual, level, the (material) articulations of identity are likely to have been more complex.⁸¹ The persistent demand for more proof for Saami presence than Norse presence has prolonged this false dichotomy as well as the division between Saami archaeology and general Nordic archaeology. This is perpetuated by a black-boxed understanding of ‘Saami archaeology’ as consisting primarily of identifying the Saami in the past and making claims to rights today based on these finds (as mentioned previously, gender archaeology experiences the same ‘thought-coercion’⁸² of derogatory connotations among those who consider this approach a politicized niche activity). While this has been the case and still is in some contexts, the term Saami archaeology should be understood to encompass all archaeology that is relevant to understanding the Saami in the past or today, be it archaeology in Saami areas, relating to Saami contacts, or affecting Saami cultural heritage management. Consequently, Saami archaeology includes Nordic archaeology,⁸³ although this is not always acknowledged.

Nordic archaeology should obviously include Saami pasts as well, considering the important intertwinements of Saami and other groups in northern Fennoscandia. Some researchers have integrated discussions about the Saami into broader works concerning Nordic archaeology, though often primarily to cast light on the Norse or other non-Saami archaeology and pasts, particularly concerning religion and rituals.⁸⁴ It is well known that there are many similarities between what we know about the Saami and the Norse pre-Christian beliefs and rituals, and for years the main discussion has been which way the impulses went. In later years, the focus has been on the similarities between Saami *noaidevuohta* and Norse *seiðr*, concluding that these are interrelated expressions of a general subarctic shamanistic culture.⁸⁵ Despite the described dangers of simplistic generalizations of ‘shamanistic’ practices, it is relevant to see many of the pre-Christian Nordic religions as interrelated. A more problematic aspect of this research is that, despite diligence in interpreting the sources, early modern written sources on Saami pre-Christian beliefs and rituals are essentially used to illuminate much earlier Norse pre-Christian beliefs and rituals. This implicitly perpetuates the early twentieth-century stereotype of

76 Olsen 1910.

77 Spangen 2016, 227–28.

78 e.g., Sørensen 2013a, 30; Kristjansdóttir (this volume).

79 Svestad 2021.

80 e.g., Hansen 1990; Hansen and Olsen 2014; Bratrein 2018.

81 e.g., Spangen 2005.

82 Fleck 1979.

83 Olsen 2004.

84 e.g., Price 2002; Solli 2002; Lund 2009.

85 Rydving 1990; DuBois 1999; Solli 2002; Price 2002; Steinsland 2005, 24; though see Steinsland 2005, 310–12.

Saami culture as static and unable to evolve.⁸⁶ It also suggests that Saami indigenous religion was homogenous and did not change for a thousand years from the Iron Age to the seventeenth–eighteenth centuries, which is not true.⁸⁷ Thus, any integration of Saami and Nordic archaeology has to include thorough source criticism and caution to avoid prolonging obsolete stereotypes.

It also illustrates the importance of considering chronological variations in group and individual identity, and how historical events have affected the construction of identities. Particularly the Christianization and colonization of Saami groups and territories should be considered watersheds. However, these processes are often also black-boxed. For instance, the Saami are generalized to have been Christianized in the early modern period through structured missionary efforts in Russia from the sixteenth century and in Norway and Sweden/Finland in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Yet, historical and archaeological sources suggest earlier Christian influences, in some contexts at least from the High Middle Ages.⁸⁸ The influences have varied between Saami areas and contact networks, conceivably also depending on individual gender identity, family connections, and activity spheres. They are connected with, and reflect differences in, the colonization processes in Saami areas. This affected regional identities as well as gender roles, which still influence Saami societies today.

An example is the different impacts the influx of early modern settlers had on the perseverance of Saami culture in various parts of northern Finland and Norway. In northern Saami areas, early settlers had to learn the Saami language and marry a Saami woman to be allowed to move into a Saami groups' area. Tax records reflect this one-generation ethnic change in, for instance, Ohcejohka (Utsjoki), a village along the River Tana. This rapid 'Saamification' allowed women to raise their children according to their traditional Saami cultural values. This would include gender roles, which differed from non-Saami communities. For instance, Saami women seem to have had stronger ownership and inheritance rights than women in neighbouring groups, which is also reflected in court rulings. In the settler village of Kyrö in the primarily East Saami area of Aanaar (Inari) in northern Finland, settlers also married local Saami women. However, here, these women had minority status, and their Saami identity was stigmatized. Consequently, they had limited opportunities to transfer Saami identity, language, and

social organization to the next generation. This variation still influences ethnic identities and gender roles in Saami areas today.⁸⁹ Any Late Iron Age intermarriages between Saami and Norse groups probably had similar dynamics and consequences for group and individual identity, depending on how many Saami (women) married into a local Norse community or regional elite and vice versa. This may have affected, for instance, dress elements, rituals, technology, language, and organization of property, land use, and inheritance.

An overarching challenge is to break down the peculiar dichotomy that is still in place between general Nordic archaeology — here assumed to incorporate Saami archaeology — and gender or feminist archaeology.⁹⁰ Within this effort, however, there should be no doubt that introducing more gender perspectives and feminist theory in Saami archaeology has a somewhat different significance from dissolving this general dichotomy. The historical status and historical role of Saami women can be said to have been doubly invisible due to a lack of attention,⁹¹ and a lack of mention of women in important historical sources to Saami pasts.⁹² This has lasting effects on the status and social role of Saami women today, for instance when it comes to rights to land use, if these are based on written archival data and historical documents concerning property ownership.⁹³ Here, an archaeological approach may have something to offer, even if there is no straightforward application of archaeology in such issues. A specifically feminist theoretical framework for how we conceptualize and use space could be one way to approach this topic.⁹⁴

There is also a need for feminist perspectives in Saami archaeology to highlight the factual role and status of women in the past. Current internal stereotypes emphasize the strength of Saami women and lack of oppression, a myth forged in the 1970s by the Saami ethnopolitical movement as one strategy to distinguish the Saami from surrounding Nordic peoples and cultures. This included a notion of past Saami societies as matriarchal. This is, at best, speculative, but it has been used to silence attempts to raise issues concerning women's rights in Saami societies.⁹⁵ A feminist perspective would help to challenge these stereotypes and promote research on gender roles in Saami pasts. However, this can only be done while also considering how colonization and Christianization have affected and changed social structures and categories in Saami contexts.

⁸⁶ Hansen and Olsen 2014, 7, 18.

⁸⁷ Salmi and others 2015; 2018.

⁸⁸ Mundal 2012; Hansen and Olsen 2014, 316–18; Rasmussen 2014; 2016.

⁸⁹ Alakorva and others 2022 with references.

⁹⁰ Sørensen 2013b, 407–08.

⁹¹ Eikjok 2007; Kuokkanen 2007; 2019.

⁹² Alakorva and others 2022, 100.

⁹³ Alakorva and others 2022, 101.

⁹⁴ Conkey 2005, 35.

⁹⁵ Bäckman 1982; Eikjok 2000; Kuokkanen 2007, 23.

Common Goals

The challenge for gender archaeology, whether feminist or not, is much the same as for Saami archaeology when it comes to being accepted as an integral part of Nordic archaeology instead of niche interests. Apart from joint efforts to this end, there are obvious overlaps in theoretical interests. Both approaches are concerned with challenging stereotypes and simplistic categories, especially concerning identity, and with uncovering hidden voices, acknowledging the inherently political aspect of our practice, and refusing dichotomous thinking.⁹⁶ There is also a shared current focus on how we engage with and understand the archaeological record in terms of e.g., materiality, and how material culture is not merely a reflection of social categories such as ethnicity and gender, but implicated in the construction of these identities.⁹⁷ A common goal is to go beyond token inclusion of gender and the Saami in archaeological studies to a more comprehensive study of social identities.⁹⁸ This archaeology will have to continue to discuss the political and practical consequences of the archaeological practice for (Saami) individuals and societies. Better integration may lead to increased attention to this discourse within Nordic archaeology, highlighting how the historical conditions of colonized and assimilated groups not only shape these groups, but also the groups that colonize and assimilate them. One aim would be an enhanced

awareness of how changes in cultural, economic, or social factors in one group or part of the Nordic countries can have massive repercussions in other parts of this interconnected area.

A theoretical framework to this end needs to include how a critical examination of racism and colonialism is an inseparable part of feminist theory and practice, and how the feminist agenda can be renewed and diversified by including indigenous perspectives. This combination will challenge and reveal blind spots within both approaches.⁹⁹ Because these aspects are so interrelated, it should be possible to move beyond the 'hierarchy of loyalties',¹⁰⁰ and beyond any sense of only having the capacity to challenge one dichotomy at a time. With a continuous conversation we would be constantly reminded how ethnicity and gender are important categories, but still just two, and not always the defining, aspects of someone's identity in a given context. With this in mind, we can work toward a Nordic archaeology that allows for social analyses of differences without resorting to the traditional organizing of our concepts in oppositions and hierarchies.¹⁰¹

Acknowledgement

This chapter was researched and written while the author was employed as Associate Professor of Historical Archaeology at UiT — the Arctic University of Norway.

⁹⁶ Conkey 2005.

⁹⁷ e.g., Svestad 2013; Sørensen 2009, 263; 2013b, 404–05.

⁹⁸ e.g., Moen 2019.

⁹⁹ Conkey 2005; Knoblock and Kuokkanen 2015, 277–78.

¹⁰⁰ Suleri 1992, 763.

¹⁰¹ Sørensen 2013a.

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The Nordic Past in Perspective

16. Gender in Migration Narratives of Neolithic and Bronze Age Europe

A few years ago, new technological advances in ancient DNA analyses led to the identification of two major events of change in the European human gene pool,¹ one connected to the spread of Neolithic ways of life into Europe, starting around 6500 BC from Anatolia and the Middle East, and successively expanding to the west and north through the next two to three millennia, and the second, seemingly more rapid, starting around 3000 BC, from eastern Europe, connected to the transformation of societies in Europe towards the Bronze Age.² These findings rapidly re-popularized older narratives of massive migrations as a main driver of social change in European prehistory.³ These narratives strongly build on long-disproven essentialist views of social group structure and ethnicity with fatal political consequences,⁴ but they also entail insidious gender stereotypes, skewed perspectives on sex and gender,⁵ and a double standard in the interpretation of the data.⁶

As with any narrative constructed to make sense of archaeological and molecular biological data, a number of assumptions have to be set as premises, which in itself is not a problem. What we need to do, however, is to critically assess those premises with as much scrutiny as we can muster, since they heavily determine the narratives. And these in turn, of course, have a bearing on

how we see our own societies, as people have the habit of believing that archaeologists produce real knowledge about the past. If certain modern stereotypes, or even just contemporaneous social arrangements are believed to have been present already in prehistory — because we construct our narratives that way — they are then easily believed to reflect some kind of immutable ‘human nature’. To naturalize our current arrangements is then also, at best, to absolve us from the duty to change things for the better, at worst, it can serve to actively oppose progressive change as being ‘unnatural’, something that is especially problematic in current discussions on gender.

For these reasons, this chapter aims to critically discuss a number of gender-related premises and biases used in the migration narratives to make sense of the new aDNA evidence in Neolithic Europe. We concentrate on the third-millennium BC steppe migration narrative. Firstly, we discuss the argument of male dominance in the third-millennium migration processes including the use of problematic concepts such as the ‘male sodalities’. We secondly discuss the argument for patrilocality in the third millennium BC, where we point out a confirmation bias in favour of such a descent system, and thirdly, the issue of the reduction of y-chromosome haplotypes, which is more complex than usually thought.

The Third-Millennium Steppe Migration Narrative

When reading accounts of prehistoric gender relations, one gets the impression that some kind of Victorian-

¹ Lazaridis and others 2014; Haak and others 2015; Allentoft and others 2015; Olalde and others 2018; Furholt 2021.

² For a summary Furholt 2021.

³ e.g., Barras 2019.

⁴ Furholt 2018; Frieman and Hofmann 2019.

⁵ Frieman and others 2019.

⁶ Frieman and Hofmann 2019.

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period image looms powerfully in the background. This is not only true for popular accounts, but also comes through in the case of more sophisticated models.⁷ Especially in the case of third-millennium 'steppe migrations', the agents of change are only male, and the whole social setting imagined is one of male, top-down patriarchal leadership. This third-millennium BC genetic event, which is connected to the formation of the archaeological units of Corded Ware and Bell Beakers, was initially promoted as a 'massive migration' from the eastern European steppe zone,⁸ bringing Indo-European languages to Europe. A little later, Kristian Kristiansen and others proposed a refined migration scenario which contains a lot of detailed observations on the archaeological materials connected to the proliferation of steppe ancestry into central and northern Europe, and thus far it represents the most elaborate model of migration for the third millennium BC in Europe.⁹ But it also contains some problematic aspects when it comes to the underlying premises. The authors take 'the Yamnaya people from the Pontic-Caspian steppe'¹⁰ as the best proxy — the exact source remains, they argue, unidentified — for the source of migrants responsible for the massive impact of genetic steppe ancestry in third-millennium BC burials connected to Corded Ware and Bell Beaker burials. The wording ('the Yamnaya people') is ambiguous, and the authors clearly intend to avoid reifying the Yamnaya phenomenon into a real historic ethnic group. They talk about 'the Yamnaya cultures' in the plural,¹¹ which makes sense, as the archaeological phenomenon itself is quite heterogeneous, and was originally defined as consisting of nine different variants of burial rites.¹² Yet, one can clearly discern an underlying implicit assumption about a uniform set of cultural traits assigned to all those Yamnaya cultures, namely that they all took part in a mobile pastoral economy, with a weakly developed tradition of pottery production, instead relying on containers made of leather, wood, and bast, and woven vessels, which would be more suited for transport on their wagons.¹³ All these characteristics of the Yamnaya people, or the Yamnaya cultures, are based upon the premise that the archaeological unit created to designate a set of burial traits, would refer to a group of people sharing a uniform set of cultural traits, which are archaeologically totally absent. The whole construction is based upon an essentialization

of cultures as a clearly circumscribed group of people sharing a coherent set of habits and values. When there is a cultural similarity between the way in which people bury their dead, according to the underlying belief there must also be similarity between the subsistence economy, the material production, and mobility patterns of these people. What is there in the background is a nineteenth-century romantic view of peoples with a distinct culture and ethnic identity. If you drop this essentialistic view of culture and ethnicity, it gets hard to argue for why the people in the Yamnaya burials should share the same traditions and objects, especially as we in reality know next to nothing about them. So, there is a stereotype of ethnicity at the root of the scenario. In accordance with its nineteenth-century origin, this ethnic stereotype is bound up with stereotypes regarding social structure, political agency, and gender roles. As part of their 2017 paper, Kristiansen and others argue for the third-millennium steppe migration being associated with the spread of Proto-Indo-European languages, something which is in line with many historical linguists.¹⁴ But again, drawing on the premise of cultural coherence, even through the millennia and across continents, they also use the idea of a larger Indo-European culture to further characterize their scenario. They use the Sanskrit Vedic hymns for the late second millennium from India and also Germanic and Celtic myths as a template to reconstruct what early third-millennium Yamnaya and Corded Ware societies might have looked like. Based on these Iron Age myths, they draw a picture of a male-dominated, war-like society, with top-down leadership, a patrilineal land inheritance system, based on primogeniture, leaving the second sons disenfranchised and eager to go out into the world to take what was withheld from them at home, making them ideal material for the first exploratory scouting missions (see below). These make for a very powerful narrative, which is helpful in the dissemination of archaeology to the public, but there remains the fact that we are using specific forms of early literature and mythology set more than a thousand years later, in Iron Age contexts where European societies had undergone fundamental transformations of social, political, and economic conditions. Many of the central components of the narrative, such as the forms of land ownership, the rules of inheritance — indeed how gender roles and relations were performed, all of these things are more or less speculation when it comes to the third millennium BC. At the core of this argument is a very narrow view of gender and sexuality, which should take into account recent discussions, which have

7 As discussed in Frieman and Hofmann 2019.

8 Haak and others 2015; Allentoft and others 2015.

9 Kristiansen and others 2017; also discussed in Furholt 2021.

10 Kristiansen and others 2017, 335.

11 Kristiansen and others 2017, 336.

12 Merpert 1974; more recently Ivanova 2013; Kaiser 2019.

13 Kristiansen and others 2017, 336.

14 Pereltvaig and Lewis 2015.

also been taken up in the archaeological discourse.¹⁵ It is true that male burials dominate in the context of Yamnaya, but most of them are not associated with weapons at all,¹⁶ even though battle-axes, halberds, and daggers proliferated in the wider region since the early to mid-fourth millennium BC.¹⁷ There is genetic evidence of a sex bias in the impact of steppe ancestry in Europe, with a higher male than female impact,¹⁸ but this finding has been challenged by leading geneticists,¹⁹ and newer evidence shows that women did play a substantial role in the genetic change connected to steppe migration and in the formation of early Corded Ware.²⁰ It is also worth pointing out that the dominance of men in Yamnaya burials and in those Corded Ware burials that can be identified as early period, might be caused by the fact that it is usually axe types that determine this date. And if indeed male individuals are more frequently found in those burials, this should be seen as a bias in our sources, that we should address, instead of taking it as a direct expression of real-world social values. Not only is it the case that we cannot archaeologically detect all burial forms present in a society — actually it is quite likely we only detect a small selection of the existing variety — more fundamentally, it is also well established that identities and social personae enacted in burial rituals have to be interpreted through the lens of ideologies and collective ritual practices.²¹

Yet, as in almost all migration scenarios, including Kristiansen and others 2017, women play a very minor role, and if they are mentioned, they are passive objects of male actions, being handed around, married away, or captured.²² Although stable isotope evidence shows that women are in fact more mobile than men,²³ this is then quickly interpreted in terms of exogeneous marriage patterns in a patrilocal system.²⁴ Male mobility is, by contrast, usually referred to in terms of migration or conquest.²⁵ Patrilocal mating systems in the European Neolithic and Bronze Age have been identified in several cases, and are therefore increasingly seen as the default setting in that period.²⁶ The reason this biased account is so easily accepted by many scholars and the public, is that it can build upon a long tradition

of sexism engrained in our modern Western habits of thought. A case in point is the motif of Indo-European male warrior bands.

A Male Bias: Indo-European Youthful Warrior Bands

This motif is central to the migration narrative of the Eurasian steppe exodus to the west, which has been very vividly unfolded by numerous authors:²⁷ as part of masculine initiation, the young men would have gone out to find their warrior skills and rich booty in other areas. Through their reports and their booty, they would have triggered the initial spark for subsequent migrations. At least since the ground-breaking publication by David Anthony,²⁸ which introduced method and theory into migration archaeology, scouts have had a firm place as the starting point of a migration process. Migration research is rich in evidence that mass migrations were initiated by pioneers and that the social composition of migration groups changed in the course of migration processes. Likewise, the gender-specificity of migration is now generally recognized. As early as 1885, Ernst Georg Ravenstein formulated in his ‘Laws of Migration’, based on British census data from 1881, that ‘females are more migratory than males’.²⁹ As a general statement, this observation no longer holds today; nevertheless, a large number of studies show that migration is or can be gender-specific depending on the historical, social, and cultural context. Migration theory is well aware that migrant groups do not form a representative cross-section of the source population.³⁰ Age and gender, as well as membership of particular social groups, condition migration behaviour. The narrative of the youthful warriors as the starting point of mass migration in the third millennium thus receives some foundation from a general theoretical point of view.

Inspired by the significance of dogs and wolves in Indo-European myths and literary traditions, Anthony and Brown also try to substantiate this foundation archaeologically.³¹ At Krasnosamarskoe in the Caspian steppe, numerous bones, especially of dogs, but also of wolves, provide evidence for the consumption of these animals. According to the finds of contemporaneous settlements in the region, these animals were not otherwise on the menu, and the authors assume that they were ritually eaten. Anthony and Brown refer to

15 e.g., Black Trowel Collective 2021; Walsh and others 2022.

16 Kaiser 2019, 89–98.

17 Jeunesse 2020.

18 Goldberg and others 2017.

19 Lazaridis and Reich 2017.

20 Papac and others 2021.

21 e.g., Parker Pearson 2003; Fowler 2013.

22 Kristiansen and others 2017.

23 Sjögren and others 2016; Knipper and others 2017; Sjögren and others 2020.

24 Frieman and Hofmann 2019.

25 Kristiansen and others 2017.

26 As criticized by Ensor 2021.

27 e.g., Kristiansen and others 2017; Anthony 2022; but see also Sergent 2003.

28 Anthony 1990.

29 Ravenstein 1885, 199.

30 Lee 1966, 56.

31 Anthony and Brown 2017.

Indo-European records in which dogs and wolves are associated with war, death, and the afterlife as well as with youthful warrior groups. They see this as a fitting explanation for the archaeological evidence in Krasnosamarskoe. As such associations can also be found in Siberia and on the American continent the authors attribute these to a common Eurasian network.³² More likely, these widely found associations only outline the dog's range and characterize the particular human–dog relationship. In any case, a specific general Indo-European cultural practice with dogs cannot be identified. Some parallels in the wide area of Indo-European cultures are striking, but they are absent in many groups. Mazzorin and Minniti present a wealth of examples of the sacrifice of dogs in ancient Rome and Greece.³³ Contexts, motives, and practices are very heterogeneous. The common thread is the special role of the dog as a guardian, which gives it a special role in initiation rites, especially at the transition to new life-worlds. However, the consumption of dog meat is not evidenced here — or in other cases. Anthony's statement that the consumption of dog or wolf meat was part of an Indo-European *rite de passage* in which men themselves became dogs or wolves³⁴ finds no confirmation in Indo-European tradition.³⁵ The parallel drawn by Anthony and Brown lacks empirical evidence; ultimately, one has rather the impression of wishful thinking in order to charge the archaeological findings from Krasnosamarskoe with special significance.

As weak as the archaeological evidence from the Caspian steppe is, the postulate of Indo-European warrior bands is generally problematic. The male sodality ('Männerbund') was 'discovered' at the beginning of the twentieth century and quickly found its way into scientific and popular discourse. The initial spark was given by the ethnologist Heinrich Schurtz,³⁶ who in a comprehensive study presented men's sodalities as a fundamental institution of social systems that could be observed worldwide. For him, these groups are characterized by a male superiority ideology, male-dominated social groups, initiation rites, and warlike activities. Essential features are the spatial segregation of men, sexual permissiveness, openly practised violence, and social deviance, which was also repeatedly noted later in ethnographic literature.³⁷ Although a systematic comparison of men's sodalities shows that these are a globally known phenomenon, their manifestation is

very specific in each case and cannot be narrowed down to the characteristics outlined by Schurtz.³⁸

Linguistically, the existence of male warrior bands in Proto-Indo-European groups is not certain, but it is filtered out of a colourful synopsis of Indian, Greek, Germanic, Armenian, and Irish texts covering continents and more than two thousand years of history. A good insight into the methodology is provided by Kershaw:³⁹ information is compiled in an eclectic manner that is supposed to substantiate the narrative of young males who lived as social deviants, were violent, unleashed on raids, went into battle ecstatically naked or wrapped in skins, and wore the black of the realm of the dead as their identifying colour. Others have already pointed out that phenomena are being conflated here that do not belong together.⁴⁰ The uncritical cherry-picking ignores the contradictions, for example, between the descriptions of Germanic wolf warriors and the Germanic warrior retinues, and it ignores all source criticism that is appropriate when, e.g., Roman and Christian authors wrote about the strange behaviour of barbaric Germanic people.

The concept of male sodalities, first formulated by Schurtz, had an impressive career in the twentieth century, especially in Germany and Austria. Through a number of academic works, not least that of Otto Höfler,⁴¹ who as a Nazi propagandist wrote one of the most influential works on the subject to this day, the 'Männerbünde' also found a broad reception internationally. From the beginning, the concepts of the 'Männerbund' also had a gender-specific agenda, which ideologized men as the bearer of culture and women as the guardian of the home and family. The postulate of the natural spiritual and cultural superiority of men over women is the central theme in all these theories. By dramatizing the role of men in society and history, the ideology connected with these male sodalities takes a clear anti-feminist position. It is certainly no coincidence that the emphasis on hegemonic masculinity gained momentum just as women's emancipation was gaining political importance at the beginning of the twentieth century.⁴²

All in all, it can be said that the concept of male sodalities as it is reconstructed for Indo-European societies is permeated in its ideological spirit by a pronounced toxic masculinity. To what extent an idea of conditions in the third millennium BC can be gained from the studies of Indo-European male

32 Anthony and Brown 2017, 146.

33 Mazzorin and Minniti 2002.

34 Anthony 2022.

35 See e.g., Kershaw 2000; West 2007.

36 Schurtz 1902.

37 e.g., Bernardi 1985; Streck 2002.

38 Schweizer 1990.

39 Kershaw 2000.

40 e.g., Zimmer 2004.

41 Höfler 1934.

42 See Blazek 2001; Bruns 2008; Zilles 2018.

sodalities is questionable. Even if one is sympathetic to the apologists of Indo-European ‘Männerbünde’, it must be emphasized that these sodalities are at best conjecture. Projecting these phenomena back into the fourth and third millennia BC describe possibilities that, however, defy verification. Kristiansen’s assertion that we are observing a *longue durée* here and can derive insights for the older periods from the more recent conditions⁴³ is highly problematic and currently lacks a scientific basis. However, the possibility of a mass migration induced by male warrior groups seems to have become a certainty and has meanwhile entered the popular narrative of Indo-European migration.⁴⁴ The same is true for specific ideas about marriage systems and family structures.

Patrilocality and Family Structures

Looking at the third millennium BC in Europe, it seems striking that patrilocality is virtually the only social setting seriously considered at all, leaving aside all the other anthropologically known configurations.⁴⁵ In addition, it is obvious that patrilocality has a very low threshold of confirmation. It is usually enough to identify a larger number of women with non-local isotope signals than men, even if the numbers are low, and statistical significance cannot be demonstrated. For example, in the third millennium BC in Europe, Sjögren and others argue for a patrilocal system for communities represented by two southern German Bell Beaker cemeteries,⁴⁶ even though the evidence is rather ambiguous. Sr and O isotopes identify seven outliers, interpreted as non-locals, five of which are female, and two male. Yet, if you break that down by cemetery, one of the two, Irlbach, has two non-local women and two non-local men. From the other, Arburg, all three non-locals are women, but two of them date to the first generation. In other words, the Sr and O isotopes show an even number of non-local men and women in one cemetery, and in the other, there is just one non-local woman outside the first generation. Sjögren and others’ discussion of these data in the article, including in combination with genetic and biological kinship data, is nuanced, except the conclusion that this evidence would, all in all, be best explained as an expression of an overall patrilocal society, even one where property is inherited down the male line of descent, which is quite a leap from patrilocality, but not an uncommon one. It

is important to stress, as did Frieman and others and Brück that patrilocality is really not to be equated with a system of unequal social standing between the sexes.⁴⁷ Such a connotation only occurs because it buys into, and thus quasi-confirms already existing premises of family and social structure, as well as assumptions about the uniformity of such structures in space and time.⁴⁸ This kind of confirmation bias is also obvious when it comes to family structures. In the central German Eulau Cemetery, four multiple burials with Corded Ware material culture were found. This deviation from the dominant single grave burial custom was probably due to the fact that these people had been violently killed, and then buried together, in a manner that does suggest close social ties as the primary motive for the combination of the individuals. It is indeed convincing to view these multiple burials, and the way they are associated as reflecting close social ties. In one grave (grave 99), the group consisted of a mature woman, a mature man, and two infants, and the y-chromosome and mtDNA haplotypes matched in such a way that the two adults could be the children’s biological parents. This was interpreted as a family consisting of biological father, biological mother, and their children, thus matching our modern understanding of nuclear family.⁴⁹ In Haak and others 2008 the issue that our current concept of family goes back to nineteenth-century Victorian ideals and archaeological interpretations are heavily skewed by these ideals is discussed, yet the finding of grave 99 is used to attest to the presence of such a concept in the Neolithic in Europe. They do even caution that the presence of one such finding in the Late Neolithic of central Germany cannot be taken as an argument for the universality of that kind of family structure, as the anthropological record clearly contradicts such a view. Nevertheless, Eulau is now commonly cited as a place where the nuclear family has been attested already in the Neolithic⁵⁰ — immediately constructing a long-term continuity from then to the present. The issue with the presentation of Haak and others,⁵¹ nuanced as it is, is probably, in hindsight, that the authors did only highlight the presence of a Victorian-style heteronormative nuclear family, while omitting the obvious variability of that concept with regards to the other burials in Eulau. Most strikingly, grave 98 consists of an adult woman and three infants, again laid down documenting close social ties, resembling a family. Yet, the adult woman is definitely not the biological

43 Kristiansen 2022, 38.

44 See Wikipedia 2022.

45 e.g., Ensor 2021.

46 Sjögren and others 2020.

47 Frieman and others 2019; Brück 2021.

48 See Brück 2021.

49 Haak and others 2008; Muhl and others 2010.

50 Bryner 2008; Randerson 2008; Archäologie Online 2008; Muhl and others 2010.

51 Haak and others 2008.

mother of the two older infants, and the third could not be determined. The authors emphasize the fact that the two children do not directly face the adult woman, although this can be explained by the fact that these three individuals follow the typical Corded Ware orientation rules, whereas these are ‘overridden’ in grave 99, so that the two boys were actually able to directly face their potential parents. But is this not a very far-reaching interpretation? When you have two multiple burials in which biological kinship could be determined, and one of the two does not adhere to the Victorian ideal, should that not be equally highlighted? Eulau does, in fact, show that our specific kind of nuclear family structure did exist, but also that it was one of several, that alternative models were present, just as it is to be expected from the anthropological literature.⁵² The fact that only one part of these conclusions was actually disseminated as the main conclusion from this finding, speaks to the way in which our prejudices shape our view of prehistory. Here again, to postulate the existence of a current Western concept of the nuclear family ‘since the Neolithic’ implies a naturalization of this family concept and has wider political implications. Its modern dominance has been credibly linked to the needs of emerging industrial capitalism,⁵³ and as indigenous scholar Kim TallBear has pointed out,⁵⁴ it is not only a Victorian ideal, as discussed by Haak and others,⁵⁵ but more crucially a Eurocentric concept, which was actively used in the settler colonial politics in North America, by connecting it to the ownership of land,⁵⁶ and which was instrumental in the destruction of indigenous social structures. It is thus even more important not to immediately go with the narrative which seemingly confirms previous assumptions, but to explicitly highlight those findings which actually deviate from our expectations, because it is these that can potentially tell us something new about the past, and thus about ourselves in general.

Double Standards in Migration Narratives

As was just demonstrated with a few examples, pre-conceptions of social organization and gender roles strongly affect the ways in which we acknowledge data and produce narrative interpretations. Findings that fit

our prejudices are highlighted, those that challenge our views are downplayed, even ignored. A very striking example of this can be found in a comparison of the narratives spun around the two major episodes of transformation of the European human gene pool, which were used to reconstruct two major periods of migration during the Neolithic period in Europe, the early Neolithic one, and the late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age third-millennium BC ‘steppe migration’. In the latter, there is a radical reduction in the number of y-chromosome haplogroups present, as well as a successive loss of those haplotypes that had actually dominated the late Neolithic populations prior to 3000 BC. This looks like a replacement of the old, Neolithic male lineages by new ones coming from the east, and it has been immediately taken up as a central argument for the narrative of a violent takeover, even genocide by several authors. After Goldberg and others proposed a sex-bias in the genetic impact of steppe ancestry in central Europe in the third millennium BC, i.e., a migration mostly by men,⁵⁷ a narrative was swiftly created, in which bands of violent young men (of the y-chromosome haplogroups R1a and R1b) swept into Europe, got rid of the autochthonous Neolithic men (which mostly shared haplogroup I2, C, and others), and procreated with the Neolithic women, so that mitochondrial DNA haplotype diversity, which is transmitted along female lineages, stayed high after that period. While Kristiansen and others were more cautious in their wording,⁵⁸ they do, as already discussed above, introduce the Indo-European teenage-boys warrior bands from the east, as well as the idea of captive women as a motive taken from anthropological studies. Yet, while Cameron,⁵⁹ on whom they rely, emphasizes the importance of such captives for society and their centrality as conveyers of cultural influence and social change, in the third-millennium BC narrative, the notion of captive women is used as a justification to strip women of any kind of agency, when it comes to third-millennium migration and social transformation — in the very same way as the notion of patrilocality. More popular accounts of the Kristiansen and others narrative then painted these gruesome genocidal images of ‘the most murderous people of all time’,⁶⁰ which also relates to the genetic accounts of Bell Beaker expansion to the British Isles since 2500 BC, and steppe impact on the Iberian peninsula after 2200 BC.⁶¹

⁵² See Brück 2021 for a recent discussion.

⁵³ Smith 1993; Reay 1996.

⁵⁴ TallBear 2018, for a discussion of this question with an archaeological focus, see Frieman and others 2019 and Brück and Frieman 2021.

⁵⁵ Haak and others 2008.

⁵⁶ Cott 2001; Carter 2008; Willey 2016.

⁵⁷ Goldberg and others 2017.

⁵⁸ Kristiansen and others 2017.

⁵⁹ Cameron 2016.

⁶⁰ Barras 2019.

⁶¹ Olalde and others 2018; Ansede 2018; Olalde and others 2019; criticized by Valera and Criado Boado 2018.

Table 16.1. Simplified table showing the dominant y-chromosome haplotypes per region and time period, highlighting the two events of replacement of male farmer lineages during the Early and Later Neolithic as well as in the Early Bronze Age: here the situation prior to Neolithic expansion into Europe.

	Middle East	Central and Western Europe	Eastern Europe, Central Eurasia
Epipalaeolithic/ Mesolithic/ Pre-Pottery Neolithic	Southern Levant: E1, T1, H2 (Lazaridis and others 2016) Iran: R2, J, P, + one G2 (Broushaki and others 2016) Caucasus: J, J2 (Jones and others 2015) Anatolia: G2 and C (Feldman and others 2019)	I2 , I1, I, especially I2a2 (Jones and others 2015; Fu and others 2016; Lazaridis and others 2016; Günther and others 2018; Olalde and others 2019; Villalba-Mouco and others 2019; Brunel and others 2020; Teschler-Nicola and others 2020)	R1, R1a, R1b (Haak and others 2015; Mathieson and others 2018; Papac and others 2021)

Table 16.2. Simplified table showing the dominant y-chromosome haplotypes per region and time period, highlighting the two events of replacement of male farmer lineages during the Early and Later Neolithic as well as in the Early Bronze Age.

	South-Eastern Europe	Central Europe	Western Europe
Early Neolithic 6500–5000	G2 and C + single I2 (Mathieson and others 2015; 2018; Hofmanová and others 2016)	G2 and C + seldom I2 (Mathieson and others 2018; Papac and others 2021; Patterson and others 2022)	G2, C, J, R, I2 (Haak and others 2015; Antonio and others 2019; Villalba-Mouco and others 2019; Rivollat and others 2020)
Late Neolithic 5000–3000		I2 , especially I2a1, and I2a2 , + some G2 and J (Keller and others 2012; Lipson and others 2017; Mathieson and others 2018; Sánchez-Quinto and others 2019; Rivollat and others 2020; Papac and others 2021)	
Early Bronze Age 3000–2000		R1a and R1b (Haak and others 2015; Mathieson and others 2018; Papac and others 2021)	

The sex bias in third-millennium BC migration has been contested,⁶² but there are some archaeological arguments that support it, such as a male dominance in Yamnaya graves as well as in the Corded Ware graves of some regions. Yet, it is increasingly clear now⁶³ that even if such a bias exists, the genetic contribution on the female side is significant, and probably regionally variable. The reduction of y-chromosome haplotype variability is also a phenomenon which is quite widespread in Eurasia and Africa, maybe even beyond, and it started long before 3000 BC.⁶⁴ Therefore there must be some more fundamental reason for that phenomenon, reasons that could have to do with a sex bias in the evolutionary selection mechanism in relation to certain social or biological factors. For example, the divergence in diversity between y-chromosome and mtDNA haplotypes starts roughly around 10,000 BC, so the

introduction of farming and changing life conditions could be a possible explanation. More important for the topic at hand, however, is that a similar shift in and reduction of y-chromosome haplotypes in Europe takes place during the Neolithic period, from 6500 BC to 3000 BC, yet this phenomenon has not been given much attention, as it contradicts certain sexed and Eurocentric ideological inclinations.

In many megalithic collective graves of central and western Europe from the fourth millennium BC, the spectrum of y-haplotypes of male individuals is decidedly narrow, and clearly dominated by variants of I2,⁶⁵ while mtDNA haplogroups are more variable. This is used to argue for a patrilineal social organization, but what is only mentioned in a half sentence, is the fact that I2 is a haplogroup that was originally associated with hunter-gatherer populations, especially in Europe, while the early farming populations coming out of Anatolia, migrating into Europe along two main routes over the

⁶² Lazaridis and Reich 2017.

⁶³ e.g., Papac and others 2021.

⁶⁴ Zeng and others 2018.

⁶⁵ Sánchez-Quinto and others 2019; Immel and others 2021.

Balkans and along the Mediterranean coasts, were, on the male side, dominated by other haplogroups, such as G2, C, and J (see Tables 16.1 and 16.2).

The Neolithic expansion into Europe very much began in central and southern Anatolia from around 6600 BC,⁶⁶ and it is thus no surprise that the y-chromosome haplotypes of early Neolithic communities in south-eastern and south-western Europe show a similar signature as the Anatolian Epipalaeolithic, Pre-Pottery Neolithic, and then early Pottery Neolithic, namely G2 and C⁶⁷ (see Table 16.2).

Along the Balkan route of expansion, nuclear DNA during 6500 and 5000 BC shows very little mixture between Anatolian farmers and western or eastern European hunter-gatherers, but it does occur, and there are single individuals with a high percentage of hunter-gatherer ancestry.⁶⁸ Also, first occurrences of variants of I2 occur from the very beginning.⁶⁹

Along the second route of expansion, along the Mediterranean coast, we see a comparable pattern.⁷⁰ Between 5000 and 3000 BC, the table turns (see Table 16.2), and I2, especially the variants I2a1, and I2a2 start dominating, most clearly in the north and

west, while G2 and J do persist in some places.⁷¹ Still, what is remarkable is that the later Neolithic of western and northern Europe, including the Michelsberg, Wartberg, Funnel Beaker,⁷² Baden,⁷³ and Globular Amphora phenomena,⁷⁴ are strongly dominated by I2, mostly I2a1 and I2a2, notably also the populations in many megalithic burials, as referred to above.⁷⁵

Even if the switch of y-chromosome haplotypes is not as radical as in the third millennium BC, there is a significant reduction and in many regions at least, a loss of the original, Anatolian and southern Levantine Neolithic haplotypes, and a replacement by such haplotypes that were originally derived from hunter-gatherer men. A sex bias in the admixture of hunter-gatherer-associated genetic ancestry into Neolithic communities, in the sense that the genetic contribution has been from male hunter-gatherers having children with farmer women, has already been reported by Mathieson and others.⁷⁶ Yet this has not led to much of a discussion about how this might be interpreted. As Catherine Frieman and Daniela Hofmann remarked, 'issues of groom price or selective raiding for husbands are not mentioned in this context.'⁷⁷ After all, while as Goldberg and others established,⁷⁸ whole communities, men and women equally, migrated into Europe to expand their Neolithic lifeways, in the course of their encounter with Mesolithic hunter-gatherers in Europe, the Neolithic men were, in many regions, not able to pass on their genes, while the Mesolithic lineages took over, even if the percentage of hunter-gatherer ancestry remained relatively low. As discussed above, there might be many different factors contributing to such a scenario, and it is probably significant, that in both cases, the Neolithic and the third-millennium steppe migration, it is the farmer lineages that have a disadvantage against the non-farmer lineages, and it is probably in the specific health and social conditions shaped by early farming that we should look for possible causal factors. But that more complex issue aside, it is important to call attention to the contrast between the absolute silence on this phenomenon, and the graphic depictions of third-millennium raids and mass murder which have been spun around the switch to R1a and R1b, or to the

66 Omrak and others 2016; Kiliç and others 2016; Feldman and others 2019.

67 These are found in north-west Anatolian Barcin; see Hofmanová and others 2016, and in early Neolithic sites in Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Romania; see Mathieson and others 2018. There are also some T1 in the mix, which had been found earlier in the southern Levant (see above). The same is possibly the case for an E1 found in an early Neolithic Impresso-context on the Adriatic coast, along with a C1 and G2; see Mathieson and others 2018. Starčevo, Vinča, and Sopot in Serbia, Croatia, and southern Hungary are also dominated by G2, accompanied by single C and H2; see Lipson and others 2017, the latter again already encountered in the southern Levant. The LBK in Western Hungary and Austria is dominated by G2 and C; see Mathieson and others 2018, along with one J2, previously encountered in the Caucasus (see above).

68 Mathieson and others 2018.

69 e.g., one individual from Barcin, north-west Anatolia; see Hofmanová and others 2016 and one from Mentese; see Mathieson and others 2015, as is one Bulgarian individual from Yabalkovo; see Mathieson and others 2018. In eastern Hungary, we for the first time encounter dominance of I2 variants, which starts with the early Neolithic Körös culture and continues over the eastern Alföld LBK; see Lipson and others 2017, which has already archaeologically been identified as showing a stronger Mesolithic influence. In other LBK contexts, G2 and C dominate, I2 is rather seldom, such as one individual in Bohemia; see Patterson and others 2022.

70 In Italy, the few reported individuals bear G and J, as well as R variants; see Antonio and others 2019, but further to the west, I2 comes into the mix, such as in the Cardial of southern France; see Rivollat and others 2020 and north-eastern Spain; see Haak and others 2015, while otherwise on the Iberian peninsula in Cardial and Epicardial contexts, G2 and C occur; see Villalba-Mouco and others 2019.

71 Rivollat and others 2020; Furtwängler and others 2020.

A prominent example being Ötzi, the Iceman, whose y-chromosome haplotype is G2a; see Keller and others 2012.

72 Rivollat and others 2020; Sánchez-Quinto and others 2019.

73 Lipson and others 2017.

74 Mathieson and others 2018; Papac and others 2021.

75 Sánchez-Quinto and others 2019; Immel and others 2021.

76 Mathieson and others 2018.

77 Frieman and Hofmann 2019, 535.

78 Goldberg and others 2017.

prominent role that this latter phenomenon has played in models of migration and social change.

The reason why the first phenomenon, the disappearance of Neolithic male lineages in favour of hunter-gatherer ones, has been so blatantly ignored is probably that it conflicts with two widespread, and strongly connected prejudices about human nature, human history, two myths really: the myth of progress, and the myth of male dominance. The transition from hunter-gatherer ways of life to Neolithic farming is by many of us still seen as fundamental progress, in the dominant evolutionist narrative which lies at the core of modern Western thinking.⁷⁹ At the same time, there is the deep-rooted idea that this progress is driven by men, by the essentially male rational mind. Yet, the data just presented, the replacement of y-chromosome haplotypes during the Neolithic period, directly violates these assumptions, especially their combination. One wonders, why no narrative of hunter-gatherer men forcing their will on Neolithic women has been formulated, which after all would be the equivalent of the narrative constructed in the third millennium. Yet, we believe, this is the wrong kind of man — not the progressive entrepreneurial farmer, who is supposed to be the main actor here, but the backwards soon to be obsolete Mesolithic hunter-gatherer. The alternative explanation, that Neolithic women actually could have been crucial here, that they could have had a say in the question of with whom they would like to procreate, seems to be even less bearable to narrative creators. Of course, both narrative versions would be caricatures, as are the third-millennium ones, but they clearly illustrate the kind of preconceived biases that shape our migration narratives, and probably more generally the ways in which we conceptualize prehistoric social relations.

Conclusion

The main issue with all these examples of biased migration narratives, we believe, is that they are built upon stereotypical, Victorian-period understandings of gender, an allocation of activity, dominance, and progress to men, and an association of mainly passivity, and not much else, to women. Broadly underlying this, we find the idea of sex and gender as being fixed and unchanging categories through the millennia, something that is encapsulated in the idea of ‘human nature’.⁸⁰ This has been convincingly challenged by several authors. Robb and Harris demonstrate that gender roles were not only different during the Neolithic of Europe, than later, but that more fundamentally, the relation between sex and gender was a different one, that gender was not, at all times the most decisive, determining social characteristic of a human being.⁸¹ In the Neolithic, they argue, as can be seen from burial rites, iconographic depictions, and the study of traces of activities on human bodies in the osteological record, gender must have been of much less universally prominent, and more situational relevance. This has also been shown by recent studies looking into prehistoric migration and mobility.⁸² In the same way, Brück demonstrates how our current notion of kinship and family have to be seen as historically situated, culture-specific social constructs, and that the anthropological record indicates a much wider spectrum of kinship and family concepts and practices.⁸³ Taking these insights seriously actually gives us the tools to read the data, such as the archaeogenetic record in a way that opens up the possibility of exploring past social worlds in a manner that can make us find out something new and unexpected about our species, and our history, instead of repeatedly projecting our prejudices into the past.

79 Frieman 2021, especially chapters 1, 2, 4; Graeber and Wengrow 2021, especially ch. 2.

80 Sahlins 2008.

81 Robb and Harris 2018.

82 Frieman and Hofmann 2019; Frieman and others 2019.

83 Brück 2021.

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17. A Case Study of the Turin Satirical-Erotic Papyrus

Historical Bodies, Mundane Resistance, and Alternative Body Worlds

This chapter is concerned with some of the many foreground and background relations involved in gendering the past. It is not concerned with the Nordic past, but rather gives a current Nordic perspective on a more distant past — ancient Egypt. The wealth of available material from ancient Egypt offers unique glimpses into another world, alternative ways of life, and more ancient traditions than the European. It forces us to reflect on change and variation, but also the belief that development is always linear and one-directional. This text is present in this publication in an effort to take seriously the relations that are involved in this project, to make explicit the often-implicit dialogue that exists between disciplines and subdisciplines, demonstrating how gendering any past context can provide shared points for reflection and requires new ways of seeing.

Through a case study of the Turin papyrus (= Turin Satirical-Erotic papyrus = CGT 55001 = Cat. 2031),¹ this chapter explores how historical bodies emerge, are shaped, and conceptualized, not only by mapping many of the earlier interpretations but also referring to other figured papyri and ostraca (potsherds or stone flakes) with unclear boundaries between men and women, humans and non-humans. The numerous interpretations reveal the inextricably interwoven relation between frontal (us and them)

and lateral (this and that) comparisons, between the papyrus and its original context (foreground relations), reconstructions (copies and copies of copies) of the papyrus, later beholders, and their multiple contexts and perspectives (background relations).² The concept historical bodies is used as an exercise in reflexivity, to move beyond strictly representational frameworks, to nurture multiplicity and complexity. This concept draws on critical and new materialist approaches, recognizing that the body not only has a history and a culturally specific logic, bodies also emerge through history, as historically contingent.³ Conceptions of the Turin papyrus, and the many kinds of historical bodies therein (human, non-human, material, non-material), are arguably entangled in mutually determining relations that together form assemblages of affective environments.⁴ These are not static, but emerge and are conceptualized through ongoing multilayered relational processes, between spatiotemporal fractal positions, perspectives, and records.⁵ Recognizing the many relations involved in these processes, and in particular the significance of the present, is key to understanding what gendering the (Nordic as well as the Egyptian) past is all about.

¹ Museo Egizio online catalogue <https://collezioni.museoegizio.it/en-GB/material/Cat_2031> [accessed 3 February 2025].

² Braun 2015. Cf. Candea 2019, about frontal and lateral comparisons.

³ The concept historical bodies among others draws on Robb and Harris's concepts bodies in history and body worlds. See Robb and Harris 2013, 1–31, 213–34; 2012.

⁴ Harris 2021, 61–65. Cf. Foucault 1980, 55–62, 183–93; Deleuze and Guattari 2013 [1987], 149–66, 232–309.

⁵ Skumsnes and others 2025. Cf. Strathern 2020; 2004 [1991]; Candea 2018.

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Figure 17.1. The Turin papyrus in its present state, the result of reconstruction by Seyffarth and later adjustments made during conservation in 1946 and 2021. Photo © Museo Egizio / Federico Taverni. Courtesy of Susanne Töpfer.

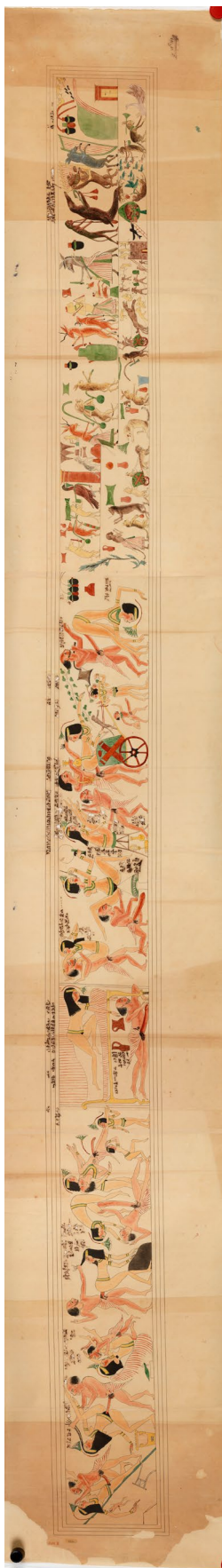


Figure 17.2. Handcopy with added watercolours located in Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. E 11656. There are substantial differences in both colour and detail compared to the original. The artist is unknown, but the copy has been dated to 1825–1850.⁶ According to Omlin (Manniche in Ortiz and others 2013, 13), both the Louvre copy and the Brooklyn/Steindorff copy are copies of Seyffarth's coloured handcopy.⁷ Photo © Musée du Louvre, Dist. RMN-Grand Palais / Christian Décamps. Courtesy of Anne-Catherine Biedermann / Barbara Vankets.

⁶ Musée du Louvre online catalogue: <<https://collections.louvre.fr/en/ark:/53355/cloro077301>> [accessed 8 July 2024].

⁷ Brooklyn Museum online catalogue: <<https://www.brooklynmuseum.org/opencollection/objects/78779>> [accessed 8 July 2024].

The Turin Papyrus and its Multiple Contexts

The Turin papyrus is decorated with black outlines that are coloured in (Figs 17.1 and 17.2). It is fragmented, has considerable lacunae, and only faint traces of colour remain today. It is assumed to originally have been one piece as suggested by three bands delimited by four lines framing the whole.⁸ But because of the considerable lacunae, and repeated use of the reverse for other textual purposes, we cannot rule out that the papyrus originally was longer, and even consisted of two or more pieces that have been glued together.⁹

The right-hand side (one-third of the papyrus) contains two registers with fifteen or more scenes showing various animals. The roles of predator and prey are often reversed, and they often wear human clothes, pose with human gestures, and engage in human pursuits, including presenting captives, executions, and offerings, playing musical instruments, riding a chariot, and besieging a fortress. The left-hand side (two-thirds of the papyrus) contains twelve scenes depicting scantily dressed men and women having heterosexual intercourse, while simultaneously drinking and playing musical instruments. The men seem older, partially bald and unkempt, short and plump, and some carry a sack over their shoulder as if on the move. Their kilts are turned backwards, exposing highly visible, oversized, and usually erect penises. The women are represented more traditionally, with hip girdles, jewellery, make-up, and large wigs, often with a lotus flower on top. Some of the scenes include children (possibly dwarfs): young girls carry one of the men (and his oversized phallus) and pull a chariot; but there is also an infant present in the far-left scene. Finally, most of the human scenes and a few of the animal scenes are accompanied by short hieratic inscriptions that, albeit very fragmentary, seem to render bits and pieces of conversation, and mention specific individuals.¹⁰ These inscriptions were clearly squeezed in between the images after the drawings were made, possibly even as a later addition.¹¹

This composition of human and animal scenes, with descriptive text on papyrus, is unique. Four other papyri — London, BM EA10016.1; London, BM EA10016.2; Cairo, JdE 31199; and Basel, BS Ae 1081 — with compositions of similar animal scenes are known, but neither have human scenes nor text. Similar single motifs — human and animal — are also

known from numerous ostraca and graffiti, and most if not all of these originate from Deir el-Medina/western Thebes in the Ramesside/Third Intermediate Period (1292–723 BC).¹² We assume this is also the provenance of the Turin papyrus. What we know for certain is that the papyrus came to the Accademia delle Scienze in Turin in 1824. It arrived in fragments, boxed with other fragments originally belonging to the Bernardino Drovetti collection. We also know that the Drovetti agents did most of their work in the Theban area. Shortly after its arrival in Turin, between 1825 and 1827, Gustav Seyffarth reconstructed the papyrus and found that the human and animal sections actually belonged together. During conservation in 1946 and again in 2021, adjustments were made to this reconstruction of the original.¹³

The fame of the papyrus can probably be attributed to the many copies and copies of copies that have been made, either stored in museums (Brooklyn and Louvre), university libraries (Madrid, Pisa, and Leipzig) or various private collections, and published in books. Comparison with these copies shows that the relation to the original is not 1:1. While some copies differ more, others render only parts of the papyrus, and few indicate clearly the fragmented condition of the original.¹⁴ Comparisons nonetheless indicate that the original has deteriorated substantially, that what we are seeing today is not the same as what earlier scholars saw. And this difference is of course nothing compared to what the papyrus must have looked like in the eyes of the original owner some three thousand years ago.

Jean-François Champollion was one of the first to see the fragments (before they were pieced together by Seyffarth), and his comments describing the animal scenes as caricatures and the human scenes as monstrous obscenity are well known.¹⁵ The fact is that this papyrus attracted the attention of many of the founding fathers of Egyptology. But despite their obvious fascination, they reacted in much the same way as Champollion, even resorting to Latin when describing the human scenes.¹⁶

⁸ Vernus 2013a, 108; 2012, 114. Cf. O'Connor 2011, 370.

⁹ Janák and Navrátilová 2008, 64.

¹⁰ To my knowledge, no one has ever managed to make sense of the text accompanying the animal scenes.

¹¹ O'Connor 2011, 362; Toivari-Viitala 2001, 78; Schumann Antelme and Rossini 2001, 152; Omlin 1973, 71.

¹² Brawanski and Fischer-Elfert 2012; O'Connor 2011; Janák and Navrátilová 2008; Toivari-Viitala 2001, 147; Omlin 1973. For more details about the dating of the larger corpus, see Backhouse 2020, 60–61; Babcock 2014, 15–20. Some of the motifs have also been argued to have antecedents in other forms, such as Old Kingdom tomb-chapels, Middle Kingdom figurines, and early New Kingdom statuettes. See Houlihan 2001, 61–63.

¹³ Communication with curator Susanne Töpfer. Cf. Manniche in Ortiz and others 2013, 9–14; Omlin 1973, 17–19.

¹⁴ It is important to note that the copies are not just secondary to the original, they have also come to live their own lives, as simulacra, indeed, primary things in themselves. See Baudrillard 1994 [1981].

¹⁵ Letter from Champollion, dated 6 November 1824, in Omlin 1973, 21.

¹⁶ Omlin 1973, 21–26.

The papyrus remained in the Turin magazines, out of public view, for the best part of two centuries.¹⁷ It has nonetheless been subject to numerous interpretations, though often discussing the two sections in isolation from one another, paying little or no attention to the inscriptions. The papyrus has been perceived variously as pornography, illustrations of oral knowledge and folklore, satire and parody of royal and elite practices, as connected to ritual activity, mythological and festival events, to creation/procreation, and most recently, an object with agency, performing resistance, and an expression of female initiative and control in heterosexual relations. The purpose of this text is not necessarily to reject earlier interpretations, but to exhaust multiple possibilities in the search for ontological difference as a productive and ever-changing force of resistance. What was the significance of this papyrus, and of the role reversals, in New Kingdom Egypt? Are they role reversals? Sex is almost never exhibited in the monuments and objects of the elite, so why is it so explicitly represented here? And what is the connection (if any) to the animal scenes? Could it be that this papyrus was not made by and for men? In seeking answers to these questions, this chapter argues that the Turin papyrus and the other figured papyri and ostraca considered here, first and foremost tell us something about historical bodies and ontological boundaries in motion. Their significance (and power) arguably lies in their differential relationship not only with each other, but also with more traditional representations, concerns with everyday life, and beyond. Their radical difference sheds light on knowledge production, mundane resistance, and the possibility of negotiating alternative body worlds.

Pornography (Human Scenes)

Emily Teeter argues that the ancient Egyptians were acutely aware of the human form, and appreciated ‘the natural beauty of the male and female body. Nudity, or near nudity, was generally not a cause for embarrassment’,¹⁸ and sexuality and sexual reproduction are usually described as integral parts of life and death in ancient Egypt.¹⁹ It is noted that while female sexuality was often symbolically alluded to visually, ‘it was not tacitly the subject of discourse, except for the topos of

the “dangerous and seductive woman” popular within didactic texts and stories’, and male sexuality was primarily ‘a thing of fascination in mythological and narrative accounts’.²⁰ Artisans were usually remarkably discreet about portraying explicit human sexual activity and sexuality, and only exposed bodies in deliberate — often idealized and stylized — ways.²¹ Julia Asher-Greve and Deborah Sweeney has thus argued that ‘clothing was considered “normative”, nakedness was situational, and nudity was restricted to specific contexts and spheres’.²²

The Turin papyrus is different from traditional representations. Not only is it sexually explicit, including statements like ‘My vulva is good for you! Come behind me with your lust! Oh, your phallus!’ (*nfr n.k k’t. i my m-s’. i hr t’y.k mrwt i hnn.k*),²³ it also exposes the naked body in unusual ways that comes across as less constrained by compositional rules.²⁴ The human section of the Turin papyrus has been argued to represent a culturally specific erotic canon,²⁵ crafted by a skilled and literate man for other men’s viewing pleasure.²⁶ But it could also be some sort of ladies’ magazine.²⁷ It has been perceived variously as a continuous series of scenes, read from right to left, telling the story of an inexperienced man and a female prostitute in a brothel,²⁸ a brothel menu,²⁹ sex manual/the Kamasutra of ancient Egypt,³⁰ and ‘the closest we get to pornography in a culture which, we are sometimes told, hardly knew sex, only “fertility”’.³¹

Scholars have identified several different individuals based on variations in the way they are artistically represented.³² The added text also refers to specific individuals, such as the scribe (*sš*) Djehuty, the scribe (*sš*) Amenhotep, and the deputy (*idnw*) Hay, son of Amennakht. Various lowlier titles/nicknames are also used, such as apprentice/assistant (*hry-’*), worker/servant (*sḏm-š*), guardian/herdsman (*š’w*), and criminal (*bt’*). One of the women has been identified as a chantress (*šm’yt*),³³ while another is possibly a singer

17 The papyrus was on display for about sixty years, from 1882 to 1943. In 1965, the papyrus was actually divided in two: the animal section was put on display while the human section remained in the magazines until the turn of the millennium when the two sections were finally reunited. See Manniche in Ortiz and others 2013, 13–14; Omlin 1973, 19.

18 Teeter 2000, 149.

19 Booth 2015, 13.

20 Meskell and Joyce 2003, 114.

21 Goelet 1993, 20. Cf. Robins 2007, 29; 1994; Baines 2007, 14–29.

22 Asher-Greve and Sweeney 2006, 125.

23 Text 3 in Brawanski and Fischer-Elfert 2012, 69–70.

24 Graves-Brown 2010, 107.

25 Meskell 2002, 137.

26 Meskell 2004, 17. Cf. O’Connor 2011, 379.

27 Landgráfová and Navrátilová 2009, 45; Janák and Navrátilová 2008, 69.

28 Wenig 1969, 21. Cf. Booth 2015, 187; Janssen and Janssen 2007, 149; Schumann Antelme and Rossini 2001, 66–68, 150–61;

Tyldesley 1994, 64–65, 129–30, 160; Watterson 1991, 38.

29 Manniche 1987, 107.

30 Ortiz and others 2013. Cf. Omlin 1973, 24.

31 Malek 1993, 118.

32 Peck 1978, 21. For more about how the half-bald male hairstyles may resemble those of particular Hathor priests, see von Lieven 2003, 52.

33 Texts 2, 6, 8, and 10 in Brawanski and Fischer-Elfert 2012, 69, 73–76.

(*hsyt*).³⁴ These names and titles (although possibly added at a later date), together with artistic details have led scholars to conclude that these are ‘outright pornographic scenes of commoners, peasants or workers, performing various acrobatic sexual positions with elegant noblewomen.’³⁵ And because the text on the back of the papyrus mentions a general of the army (*imy-r mš*),³⁶ Pascal Vernus argues that these particular transgressions were a deliberate choice by the elite, so that they could temporarily enjoy pleasure without the sense of guilt that the moral norm and their superegos might otherwise have aroused in them.³⁷ But it may also be that the village men were ‘parodying their own position as lower status, or at the mercy of the elite.’³⁸

Oral Knowledge and Folklore (Animal Scenes)

The existence of other similar compositions, and the fact that certain single motifs occur again and again,³⁹ imply that these compositions were not necessarily whims of the moment.⁴⁰ Figured ostraca more generally have been suggested to be informal sketches, either as preparatory steps to layout and detail in formal art,⁴¹ or as copies based on already existing monuments.⁴² But since many of the figured papyri and ostraca do not have specific, identifiable sources among more traditional representations,⁴³ they are also described as freestyle art,⁴⁴ or even the product of school exercises.⁴⁵

Emma Brunner-Traut has suggested that many of the animal scenes may actually be illustrations of now-lost folktales, fables/didactic stories, jokes, and proverbs.⁴⁶ No parallel texts survive to prove this, but the tradition of fables is known from textual sources from the Middle Kingdom onwards, and the anthropomorphized animals are well known from New Kingdom and especially later Demotic literature.⁴⁷ Christopher Eyre, on the other hand, suggests that the figured papyri and ostraca

discussed here were used as story-telling aids for children, as visual supplements to illustrate the narrative in what was probably a largely oral tradition.⁴⁸ Following this, Jennifer Babcock recognizes what she describes as a stock set of characters and motifs, and organizes them into eight different categories: elite animals and offering scenes, chariot riding, religious scenes, agricultural and food production scenes, animal musicians, the *Distant Goddess* and the Cat/Vulture Fable, the boy, cat, and mouse, the hippopotamus and the crow; in addition to miscellaneous and unclear motifs.⁴⁹ Because no textual evidence survives to explain the exact meaning of the different motifs, nor their connection to one another, Babcock suggests two possibilities: the different motifs are either unrelated, each representing different individual narratives, or they are related to one another, each representing layers within larger narrative frames or nested narratives. In the case of the latter, she also speculates whether the different motifs were bound by a particular order or could be (re)arranged and read as the storyteller wished.⁵⁰

We can speculate similarly about the relationship between the different motifs on the Turin papyrus. David O’Connor has, for instance, argued that the animal and human sections of the Turin papyrus should be considered together, in relation to each other, not simply as illustrations but as a proper work of art. Although designed as a composite whole, he nonetheless recognizes that because ‘viewing or “reading” the papyrus involved a continuous process of unrolling and, contemporaneously, rolling up the papyrus, so that only segments of it would be exposed to the viewer at any one time,’⁵¹ there would be ample room for choice and variation, not just from time to time but also between different users. It is also interesting to note that certain motifs, such as those of chariot riding and Geb-and-Nut, are repeated multiple times in different forms in both the human and animal sections, suggesting that these may have carried a particular significance.⁵²

Satire and Parody

The Turin papyrus has most often been perceived within the framework of caricature and satire, as

34 Toivari-Viitala 2001, 147 n. 76, 148. Cf. Brawanski and Fischer-Elfert 2012, 77.

35 Ezzat 2021, 18.

36 Omlin 1973, 70.

37 Vernus 2012, 117; 2013a, 114.

38 Meskell 2004, 159.

39 Babcock 2013, 52–55; Malek 1993, 116.

40 Flores 2004, 234.

41 Maspero 1912, 168–69; Borchardt 1910.

42 Schäfer 1916, 46.

43 Dorn 2011, 221.

44 Houlihan 2002, 124; Schumann Antelme and Rossini 2001, 102.

45 Peck 1978, 31; Peterson 1973, 53.

46 Brunner-Traut 1979, 11–18; 1968; 1963. Cf. von Lieven 2009; Janák and Navrátilová 2008; Flores 2004.

47 Babcock 2022, 70–71; Teeter 2002a, 270.

48 Eyre 2011, 177.

49 Babcock 2014, 107.

50 Babcock 2022, 55–79; 2017; 2014, 86–127.

51 O’Connor 2011, 370.

52 This final point makes me wonder, similarly to Champollion, whether this papyrus is actually a collector’s item, a collection of favourite motifs. See Omlin 1973, 17 n. 3. For more about the collections of wandering storytellers, see Braun 2015, 353; Parkinson 2009, 141.

parody and critique of state, society, and religion.⁵³ For instance, the chariot-riding motif — found in both the human and animal sections — is usually understood as an imitation of the monumental battle scenes so commonly found on Ramesside temples, such as the Ramesseum and Medinet Habu, where the king is usually represented alone in such a vehicle, with bow and arrow and horses trampling his enemies. In two of the scenes on the Turin papyrus, the king is replaced by a naked woman (having intercourse from behind) and a dressed mouse, respectively, the horses have been replaced by naked girls and dogs trampling cats, and finally the bow and arrow has, in the human scenes, been replaced by convolvulus leaves and a monkey.⁵⁴

Norman Davies notes that

when one thinks how the days of the draughtsman were spent in recording the pious aspirations and braggart boasts of men whose life-course he knew to have no resemblance to their memorials, or the god-like nature of the monarch whose weaknesses were suspected by every ragamuffin in Thebes, one cannot wonder if he finds vent for his disgust in an exclamation at the topsy-turvy world of his masters, or in snatching up an unsullied flake and making his pen express the irony of life.⁵⁵

But it has also been suggested that the cat and mouse war motif represents didactic folktales well known from elsewhere in the ancient Near East, where

a treacherous cat betrays its promise and provokes an organized retaliation by the mice. The mice gain the upper hand, but their supremacy is only temporary. Eventually the cats triumph, returning this topsy-turvy situation to once more in keeping with the natural order.⁵⁶

Diana Flores, on the other hand, has pointed out that

if this image of an upside-down world was meant to express the triumph of the meek over the mighty, the low over the high, then a return to the natural order would not only defeat the mice but a satirical intent as well.⁵⁷

O'Connor distinguishes between parody and satire, claiming that both sections of the papyrus

are best understood as parody, ridiculing more elevated models for the sake primarily of amusement (for, however, a relatively well educated and sophisticated audience); and not as satire, deploying — in pictorial terms — ridicule, irony, sarcasm, etc. for the purpose of exposing and discouraging vice or folly on the part of individuals, classes or society as a whole.⁵⁸

Babcock reminds us, in a similar vein, 'how improbable it is that people working on the royal tombs would want to openly mock their source of income.'⁵⁹ Patrick Houlihan, in fact, argues that 'the rollicking good fun and laughs on them are immediately recognizable and are able to successfully transcend the absence of written language.'⁶⁰ But elements of ambiguity and more layered meanings should not be ruled out: while the human motifs may surely be understood as an ironic commentary on the love poetry enjoyed by the Ramesside elite, they may also be argued to include hand gestures by some of the men reminiscent of the treatment of captured, female prisoners of war, implying coercive sex/rape.⁶¹ The central motif in the animal section may, similarly, be understood as a witty caricature of the offering scenes so commonly found in New Kingdom elite tombs. If we look more closely, however, we see that the donkey is not only dressed like a priest, he also holds a staff and crook like a high and mighty judge passing verdict over other creatures, seemingly being killed and sacrificed.⁶²

Mundane Resistance through Knowledge Production

Ludwig Morenz describes the Turin papyrus as having carnivalesque features, representing a carnival-like dimension of Egyptian culture.⁶³ O'Connor has similarly pointed out that each section of the Turin papyrus involves a double reversal or inversion of actuality: in addition to performing actions only possible for humans, the natural roles of the animals themselves are also reversed.⁶⁴ For instance, we find a crow climbing

53 Janák and Navrátilová 2008, 66–67; Toivari-Viitala 2001, 147–48; Omlin 1973, 21–26, 38–56.

54 In a third scene, today almost completely lost from the original papyrus but visible in the Louvre copy, we again find a mouse driving a chariot, pulled by two dogs/lions, with huge cats represented on either side.

55 Davies 1917, 236. Cf. Houlihan 1996, 211–12; Malek 1993, 114.

56 Flores 2004, 235–36. Cf. Brunner-Traut 1954, 14.

57 Flores 2004, 236.

58 O'Connor 2011, 362. Cf. Sweeney 2009, 541.

59 Babcock 2013, 52. Cf. O'Connor 2011, 377.

60 Houlihan 2001, 61. Cf. Babcock 2014, 21–22; Janák and Navrátilová 2008, 69; Malek 1993, 113.

61 O'Connor 2011, 376, 380.

62 Ezzat 2021, 16.

63 Morenz 2012, 110. Cf. Assmann 1993.

64 O'Connor 2011, 376. Cf. Vernus 2013b, 106; Meskell 2004, 166.

the steps of a ladder in order to ascend to the top of a tree, while a hippopotamus bounces from branch to branch collecting fruits in a basket. It is important to note, however, that there is no double reversal in the human section. Although the representations of male and female bodies seem less constrained by compositional rules, they are unusual compared to traditional representations. The highly visible, oversized, and usually erect penises are clear indications that representing reality was not the intention.

These scenes are obviously those of a topsy-turvy world, but to read them simply as a cartoon, as evidence of humour and amusement, arguably ‘fails to theorize satisfactorily the vast sweep of motivations and meanings conveyed through the very act of (their) performance, of crafting and circulating these iconic and parodic renderings.’⁶⁵ Lynn Meskell reminds us that the artists, after all, had the intellectual capabilities to invert the order of things cleverly, to produce ‘an alternative and parallel discourse that subverted social structure and hierarchy through the use of skills, humour and narrative.’⁶⁶ My argument here is that instead of simply being representations of pornography (human scenes), oral knowledge and folklore (animal scenes), satire and parody, the Turin papyrus and the larger corpus of figured papyri and ostraca also had the possible side-effect of destabilizing ontological boundaries between what was and what potentially could be. I say possible side-effect because I am not suggesting any kind of collective effort to intentionally make a difference through objects. This is not the only way resistance works, how change comes about. What I am suggesting is a much more omnipresent kind of resistance. Instead of focusing on how objects have agency and can perform resistance in and of themselves, my focus is on the relational, comparative, indeed, experimental and ongoing processes that these objects were and continue to be part of.⁶⁷ Kathlyn Cooney, for instance, argues that

sketching on ostraca was part of an informal system of ongoing cultural and artistic practice by succeeding generations of artisans based on common images

and styles that enabled increased proficiency in proportion, colour use, and dexterity, as well as creating an avenue for creativity and innovation.⁶⁸

From the perspective of cognitive formations, she alludes to how figured ostraca may have functioned as the bridge between play, practice, and work, and ‘allowed a complex network of knowledge transference, not only linearly, perhaps within master-student apprenticeship systems, but also diffusely among intermediate and skilled members of the community.’⁶⁹ What we have to remember is that these papyri and ostraca were not simply made to be tossed away, stored, and forgotten. They were also copied and appropriated, viewed and translated, over and over, from one generation to the next, from past to present. The fact that some of them were placed within/nearby tombs and temples to function as, among other things, *ex-votos*, while many others have been found in the archaeological debris in/connected to the Deir el-Medina workmen’s village,⁷⁰ illustrates well the process of making connections, how conceptions of figured papyri and ostraca emerge from assemblages of multiple human and non-human, material and immaterial components from the very start, with the ebbing and flowing of change as the norm, and difference as the driving force behind every becoming.⁷¹ While it is true that no two pieces are ever identical, the fact that many of the figured papyri and ostraca so explicitly queer (and provide alternative perspectives on) more traditional motifs, forces us to recognize the claim that neither power (sameness) nor resistance (difference) ‘has ongoing stability or a pre-given form; each is the ramifying effect of the other.’⁷² According to Deleuze’s reading of Foucault, ‘the latter are not simply the “repercussions” or the “passive side” of the former but are rather “the irreducible encounter” between the two.’⁷³ In the following, I will therefore take a closer look at specific assemblages of sameness (power) and difference (resistance) in the corpus of figured papyri and ostraca, focusing particularly on the relation between human and non-human (animals and gods), men and women, everyday life and extraordinary festivals, procreation and creation, to explore further how alternative body worlds were and continue to be negotiated and conceptualized.

⁶⁵ Meskell 2004, 148–49.

⁶⁶ Meskell 2004, 150–51. Cf. Moreno Garcia 2017, 142; Jasnow and Smith 2010.

⁶⁷ Skumsnes and others 2025. I recognize that objects with particular funerary and healing purposes were intentionally made to induce change, but this ability to induce change was not caused by the object and its symbolic significance alone. The analogistic nature of ancient Egyptian concepts instead draws attention to the process of making relations, in fact ‘evoking ontological connections between different parts of the cosmos’. See Nyord 2020, 77.

⁶⁸ Cooney 2012, 165.

⁶⁹ Cooney 2012, 147. Cf. Piek 2017.

⁷⁰ Babcock 2022, 10–11.

⁷¹ Harris 2021, 51; Harris in Crellin and others 2021, 40; Crellin 2020. Cf. Gullion 2018; Bennett 2010; Barad 2007.

⁷² Grosz 2008, 41–42. Cf. Foucault 1984–1988 [1976–1984], I, 95–96; Foucault in Deleuze and Guattari 2013 [1972], xiv.

⁷³ Deleuze 2006 [1986], 60. Cf. Deleuze 2014 [1968]; Wagner 2019; 2016 [1975]; Candea 2018, 225–41.

The Relation between Human and Non-human, Men and Women, Part I

It is often stated that the ancient Egyptians lived in a harmonious relationship with all elements of creation, that their worldview did not single out or treat human beings as any different from that of other living beings.⁷⁴ Yet, both text and art classify and differentiate between human, animal, and divine beings, and the king/humankind/elite male are often displayed while making efforts to control and master the cosmos, usually under the pretence of preventing chaos.⁷⁵ The Turin papyrus, and those other figured papyri and ostraca under consideration here, are interesting because they have an open-endedness to them that arguably encapsulates how boundaries and hierarchies were conceptualized in multiple, even contradictory terms.⁷⁶ Anthropomorphized animals are arguably the very embodiments of such complexity. Animals were helpers, pets, and companions in life and death. Their association with cult and mortuary practices not only involved sacrifice and feasting, some animals also held profound spiritual and cultic significance, with the distinction between human, animal, and divine often being blurred in rituals, fables, and royal ideology.⁷⁷

In such a context, it is interesting to note the prominent role given to the mouse, well known from everyday life but without any divine associations, in the figured papyri and ostraca. In addition to the already mentioned cat and mouse war motif, the boy, cat, and mouse motif is also well known. On ostrakon Chicago, OIM E13951,⁷⁸ the mouse is dressed in a pleated kilt. He is standing on his hind legs, on a raised platform with a chair behind him, leaning on a lotus staff. The mouse is obviously the one with highest rank, acting as some kind of overseer or judge. The cat is also standing on his hind legs. He has no clothing on, but holds a large stick over the head of the boy and acts as the executioner. The boy is positioned between the mouse and the cat, kneeling with arms above his head, as a sign of surrender, possibly even warding off blows. He is naked and has a sidelock, which clearly plays on traditional representations of elite children.⁷⁹ This is also one of the rare examples where we find an inscription/caption on the back of the ostrakon,

reading ‘The cat, (the) mouse, and the boy’ (*t’ myt pnw p’ dd*).⁸⁰ In other variants of this motif the roles of cat and boy are shifted in relation to one another, while the mouse remains in the primary position (e.g., Stockholm, MM 14960; and Cairo, RT 29-12-21-2). This particular motif may also be connected to the already mentioned judgement scene on the Turin papyrus, which is carried out by altogether different animals. Taken together, we may speculate whether the motif caricatures the imperial abuses of the king and his men, someone who is unhappy with receiving/carrying out court punishments, or the hierarchal teacher–pupil relationships well known from the literature.⁸¹ The teacher–pupil relationship may be even closer at hand if we follow Cooney, who describes the figured ostraca as ways of transferring knowledge from one generation to the next, between the skilled and the less skilled.⁸²

There are many examples of specific motifs that come in multiple forms, as variants on the same theme, including those drawing on traditional art. It is suggested here that these may, in fact, illustrate how transfer of knowledge also involved play, negotiation, and, above all, appropriation of knowledge. Papyrus London, BM EA10016,⁸³ for instance, depicts a lion playing a board game with a gazelle, possibly resembling scenes of Ramses III playing *senet* with his daughters on the temple walls of his mortuary temple, Medinet Habu. To the right, there are well-known themes of foxes carrying bags over their shoulders: one is playing a double flute while the other is herding goats. There is also a cat herding geese. To the far right, however, there is a unique representation of a lion on its hind legs having sexual intercourse with a hoofed creature (possibly a gazelle) reclining on its back on a bed.⁸⁴ Scholars have suggested that the lion and the hoofed creature are the same as those playing the board game, possibly displaying the winner of the game literally taking his prize.⁸⁵ Although this explanation as well as the sexual nature of this scene is disputed,⁸⁶ this is the closest the animal scenes get to the erotic scenes on the Turin papyrus. While lively scenes of mating animals are a common feature in traditional art,⁸⁷ it is highly unusual to see two different species mating like

74 Teeter 2002a, 251; Germond and Livet 2001, 11–13.

75 Evans 2020; Brémont 2018.

76 Babcock 2017; Assmann 2001, 112.

77 Recht and Tsouparopoulou 2021, 1. Cf. Hartley and others 2017; Teeter 2002b; Houlihan 1996.

78 OIM online catalogue: <<https://oi-idb.uchicago.edu/id/da384910-6ccc-447a-bb31-3d48e9167142>> [accessed 18 April 2023].

79 Malek 1993, 114.

80 Brunner-Traut 1979, 17.

81 Babcock 2022, 73–75.

82 Cooney 2012.

83 The British Museum online catalogue: <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA10016-1> [accessed 18 April 2023].

84 Papyrus Basel, BS Ae 1081, may include a similar scene, showing an animal (possibly a donkey) reclining on its back on a bed, possibly with a lion standing at the foot end.

85 Houlihan 2001, 66.

86 Houlihan suggests that the lion is carrying out mummification rituals on the donkey. See Houlihan 1996, 216.

87 Evans 2015, 1659.

humans, not to mention the effort made 'to indicate the lion's penis and show an almost x-ray of the penetration of the gazelle's body'.⁸⁸

Returning to the erotic scenes on the Turin papyrus, Meskell has argued that these images

sexualize and commodify women through their construction as visual subjects. The to-be-looked-at aspect of the female subject is not mirrored by the Egyptian male. She is rendered passive and inactive in all spheres. She is not shown producing or contributing for the most part, yet she is there to be consumed, visually and erotically.⁸⁹

Although this may certainly be the case for the highly normative monumental art, I wonder, is this the case with the Turin papyrus? Is it not existing practice in general and masculine dominance more specifically that is being caricatured (and objectified) here? Jaana Toivari-Viitala may be on to something very important when she points out that the figured papyri and ostraca depicting sexual intercourse 'were not primarily concerned with the rendering of existing gender ideals projected onto the female body, but focused on the sex act, with its range of possible associations: pleasure, potency, procreation etc.'. ⁹⁰ Others draw parallels to the love poetry and claim that the Turin papyrus represents a discursive concern with particular life stages. ⁹¹ Ann Macy Roth even argues that the Turin papyrus is an expression of radically different gender roles, of female initiative and control in heterosexual relations. She suggests that it represents divine power, intended for women, and to be given as a votive offering to the goddess Hathor. ⁹²

The inclusion of lotuses, hip-girdles, make-up, kohl jars, musical instruments, convolvulus leaves, sistra, *menat* necklaces, and mirrors all imply a connection to the cult of Hathor, and may even have been intended to identify the women with Hathor herself. The oversized penises may similarly have to do with the many clay, wood, and stone phalli found deposited at Deir el-Bahri, Deir el-Medina, Mirgissa, Timna, and so on. ⁹³ As votive offerings prepared for the cult of Hathor, these material objects were intended to venerate specific aspects of the human body, usually potency and fertility, whether agricultural or human, male or female. ⁹⁴ But the links to Hathor cult, festival activity, and mythological events also give life to alternative worlds, where traditional

(power) relations, the perception and conceptualization of bodies, were more in flux. The final scene on the Turin papyrus is a case in point. It depicts a woman reclining on her back on an inclined surface, with a man on top of her. The scene arguably represents will and lust, as she draws the man's head toward her, while he touches her face. But there are also more open-ended elements: an infant is clinging to the woman's right arm (or alternatively falling towards the floor while waving/stretching out towards the woman/couple), and a piece of furniture (possibly a stool) has fallen over. Finally, in her right hand, the woman holds a pen, as if she was about to scribble down something. This would surely be unusual, but so is the entire papyrus. The pencil is usually seen as a make-up utensil, and one of the other scenes does indeed depict a woman putting on make-up, but what if this pencil had another purpose? What if this scene actually represents the woman behind the story, writing herstory as an alternative to the traditional male elite story? The miniature child, who is clinging to her right arm or falling towards the floor while waving/stretching out towards the woman/couple, may be a further clue. Could it be that the woman was taking matters into her own hands, trying to actively influence the course of events, similar to Isis in the contendings of Horus and Seth? Meskell has, among others, drawn attention to how the red-coloured details on the men's penises (which are particularly visible on the Louvre copy) signify potency and masculinity, but may also draw attention to Seth who despite his sexual proclivities was not actually able to procreate due to the efforts of Isis/Horus. ⁹⁵

The Relation between Everyday Life and Extraordinary Festivals

Dieter Kessler has suggested that the Turin papyrus is anchored in the liminal events of the New Year's, Valley and Drunkenness Festivals, evoking the union between Amen-Re/Osiris and Mut/Hathor/Isis on the one hand, and the rejuvenation/rebirth of the king/Horus on the other. The human section may represent priests, musicians, and dancers enacting these (and other) events, whilst the anthropomorphized animals evoke their own particular mythological significance as primordial beings, inhabiting the waters of Nun. ⁹⁶

The New Year's festival celebrates the celestial cycle of Sirius, in particular the return of Sothis, also known as the daughter/eye of Re. In the myth of the *Distant Goddess*, the daughter/eye of Re (Hathor/Tefnut)

⁸⁸ Meskell 2004, 169.

⁸⁹ Meskell and Joyce 2003, 115.

⁹⁰ Toivari-Viitala 2001, 145.

⁹¹ O'Connor 2011, 378–80; Mathieu 1996, 151–59, 246–47.

⁹² Roth 2017. Cf. Mysliwiec 2004, 137.

⁹³ Roberts 1995, 9; Pinch 1993.

⁹⁴ Meskell and Joyce 2003, 111–16.

⁹⁵ Meskell 2004, 171.

⁹⁶ Kessler 1988, 182–92.

had quarrelled with her father and run off into the far south. In the *Return of the Goddess*, her father sends Thoth (variously identified as Shu, Onuris, and others) to persuade her return. Thoth had to pull a number of tricks: among other things, he transformed into a monkey and entertained her with dance, wine, and several animal stories (among others the Cat/Vulture fable); and finally managed to make her laugh.⁹⁷ She was escorted back, followed by an entourage of exotic and mythical beings, including animals in human roles, playing musical instruments, singing, and dancing.⁹⁸

These festival activities overlap with other events that occur at the height of summer, when the burning sun and the dry khamsin winds were at their most implacable. The Valley and Drunkenness Festival celebrates the much-anticipated flooding of the Nile, when torrential rains in Ethiopia sent fertile red clay with the Nile, not only making the river red like blood but also on occasion higher than usual, potentially causing poor harvests or even crop failure, death, and suffering across the entire land. The *Book of the Heavenly Cow/Destruction of Mankind*, alludes to a time when humans had rebelled against the gods. Re was angry, and sent his daughter Hathor, in the form of the fierce lion-goddess Sekhmet, to teach them a lesson. But because she grew more bloodthirsty every day, Re and the other gods grew weary of total destruction, and therefore decided to trick her by pouring a mix of mandrake and beer (or variously just beer coloured red) over the country. Sekhmet drank the blood-like substance and soon forgot about destroying humanity.⁹⁹

The Mut temple, along with the royal mortuary temples (Deir el-Bahari in particular) and elite tombs in western Thebes, was the place par excellence for the drunkenness celebrations. These included communal ritual activity, such as music, dance, and offerings, and according to later demotic texts, also eating to excess, drinking until intoxicated, and sexual behaviour, culminating in the appearance of the goddess, with everyone in ecstasy.¹⁰⁰ These acts were intended to keep the goddess satisfied, to make sure that she did not unleash any more death and destruction. People celebrated annual festivals throughout the land in order to harness the creative powers (including erotic energy) of the goddess.¹⁰¹

The Relation between Creation and Procreation

Jiří Janák and Hana Navrátilová have pointed out that the style and genre of the Turin papyrus most closely resembles the female funerary papyri of the late Ramesside/Third Intermediate Period.¹⁰² The funerary papyri of this period show great diversity: artists are not only becoming more numerous, and showing more variation in their skills, they are also clearly experimenting with texts and motifs.¹⁰³ It is probably in this context that Adolf Erman has suggested the Turin papyrus to be a special kind of *Book of the Dead*.¹⁰⁴ For instance, three of the human scenes allude to the well-known Geb-and-Nut motif, he lying on the ground (as the earth), while she is bowed over him (as the heaven).¹⁰⁵ And the division into twelve scenes may be an analogy to the *Book of the Amduat*, where the sun-god Re journeys through the twelve hours of the night.¹⁰⁶ The central motif in the Turin papyrus may not only refer to the sixth hour of the night, where the deceased unites with Re, but also to Isis as a kite, impregnating herself while hovering over the dead body of the deceased/Osiris, and to Hathor showing her private parts to her father, Re. Finally, the far-left scene may carry reference to the twelfth hour of the night, which ends with the rebirth of Osiris, usually representing him sleeping in a diagonal position on a sloping surface.¹⁰⁷

Emma Brunner-Traut and others have looked elsewhere for parallels, arguing that the figured papyri and ostraca share features with the remains of wall paintings,¹⁰⁸ often associated with the front room and household altar (the so-called *lit clos*) in houses at the Deir el-Medina and el-Amarna workmen's villages.¹⁰⁹ Their human motifs are noteworthy because, contrary to traditional representations, women and particular female activities often appear to be the focus of the

unambiguous evidence for sexual intercourse in a cultic context is so limited, Jasnow and Smith argue that it was not widespread, and possibly more often only alluded to in euphemistic terms, such as in 18th Dynasty banquet scenes. See Brose 2009; Jasnow and Smith 2010, 50.

102 Janák and Navrátilová 2008, 68–69. Cf. O'Connor 2011.

103 Nawiński 1989, 43–45, 229–38.

104 Erman in Omlin 1973, 22.

105 For comparisons, see London, British Museum, EA10018,2: Omlin 1973, taf. XXVIIIb; and London, British Museum, EA10554,87: <https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/Y_EA10554-87> [accessed 18 April 2023].

106 Assmann 1993, 37.

107 For comparison, see Cairo, JdE 31986: Omlin 1973, taf. XXIa.

108 Brunner-Traut 1956, 64–65. Cf. Backhouse 2020, 6; Vandier d'Abbadie 1936, 5.

109 Stevens 2006, 234; Kemp 1979; Brunner-Traut 1955; Bruyère 1953; 1939; 1923.

97 Jasnow 2001, 65.

98 Darnell 1997; 1995, 156–59; Roberts 1995, 12–13.

99 Lichtheim 2006, 197–99; Simpson 2003, 289–98; Roberts 1995, 10–12.

100 Bryan 2014. Cf. Jasnow and Smith 2010; Depauw and Smith 2004.

101 Fazzini 2010, 99; von Lieven 2003, 52–54; Teeter 2000, 158. Sexual intercourse as ritual act was, according to Brose, intended to induce the onset of the Nile inundation. But because explicit,

narrative.¹¹⁰ The motifs usually include almost nude women, at their toilette, dancing, nursing their child, enclosed by a kiosk, sometimes with anthropomorphized animals and male servants. Hermann also links these representations to figurines that show a woman sitting or reclining on a bed as reflecting the imagery of New Kingdom love poetry and representing women awaiting their lovers.¹¹¹ Joanne Backhouse, on the other hand, argues that

the 'women on beds' scenes are likely to show the celebrations relating to the birth of a child, while the kiosk scenes relate to the seclusion of the mother after the birth; although these are more likely to be symbolic than real structures.

She continues that 'the depiction of the mother and child also relates to concepts of birth and rebirth which is based on sexual activity in this life and the next.'¹¹²

The Relation between Human and Non-human, Men and Women, Part II

Hair, wigs, and scenes of hairdressing are other key features in the motifs on figured papyri and ostraca.¹¹³ On papyrus Cairo, JdE 31199, for instance, four cats serve a seated mouse in a way that resembles the banquet scenes so frequently depicted in 18th Dynasty tombs. The mouse is dressed in a typically female full-length transparent dress, wears heavy eye make-up and a large wig. She sits on a tall, wicker stool with her feet on a footrest, while being attended to by what presumably is a male cat, standing in front of her. She holds a cup in her left hand, apparently sipping wine through a straw. Behind her, another cat styles her wig, in a similar fashion to how servant girls are represented attending to their mistresses in banquet scenes. This cat even has a sidelock, held up with a hairpin, implying that he is a boy (not yet a man) of elite origin.¹¹⁴ The next, smaller cat, carries a baby mouse in a sling around its waist like a nursemaid, while the last of the four cats carries a wine jar in one hand and a large fan in the other. None of the cats have any clothing on. Motifs such as these arguably allude to fertility: the act of hairdressing in traditional representations signalled a state of being/rite of passage, and served as an indicator that sexual

activity was to follow.¹¹⁵ But Azza Ezzat points out that the symbolic effects of animals acting out such banquet scenes is enhanced by reversing not only the natural animal order in which the predator serves the prey, but also artistic conventions about gender.¹¹⁶

We can see this in the Turin papyrus as well, where most of the women wear what seem to be elaborate wigs with braids. Three of the scenes even portray men pulling/grasping after the long hair of their female partners, possibly as a blatant reference to how naked women with long hair/wigs were traditionally used symbolically 'to ensure conception and safe birth into this world, and, by extension, rebirth into the next.'¹¹⁷ From this perspective, it is curious that the only woman in the Turin papyrus not paying attention to any of the men, not involved in sexual intercourse, is represented with short hair. She is putting on make-up, holding a large mirror and possibly a make-up vessel in one hand, and a cosmetic stick in the other. She has a lotus on top, wears a hip-girdle and jewellery. Her legs are spread wide apart, displaying her pubic area. She is seated on a circular and pointy device, arguably illustrating vaginal fumigation, known from gynaecological texts.¹¹⁸ A man is squatting on the ground next to her, supporting her right leg with one hand while possibly handling the device with the other. The key feature here is that she is turning her face away, and the accompanying text indicates that she is not happy with her male companion. His lack of experience apparently causes damage to her good reputation.¹¹⁹ In three of the central motifs, moreover, a man is first lying on his back being held up by a woman. Second, he looks almost unconscious, being carried off by three women and, third, he is lying underneath/alongside a bed with a woman reaching out from above, possibly to help him up. In the text he is also complaining about feeling ill.¹²⁰ Two (beer/wine) jugs nearby suggest a state of alcoholic stupor. His flaccid penis could also be an effect of too much alcohol. Alexander Brawanski and Hans Fischer-Elfert thus suggest that the papyrus is a lesson for the male ego, about how a man should/not behave. The temporary self-inflicted impotence (possibly caused by too much alcohol) indicates the loss of self-control and ability to procreate, which was not in accordance with what was perceived as morally correct behaviour.¹²¹ If we return to the woman in the final scene, her dangling right arm,

¹¹⁰ Backhouse 2020, ix.

¹¹¹ Hermann 1959, 161. Cf. Pinch 1993, 220; 1983, 411–12.

¹¹² Backhouse 2020, 108.

¹¹³ Backhouse 2020, 96–99.

¹¹⁴ According to Robins, this kind of sidelock was worn by both girls and boys, as well as the lunmutef priest and the high priest of Ptah at Memphis. See Robins 1999, 57.

¹¹⁵ Derchain 1975, 65.

¹¹⁶ Ezzat 2021, 9. Cf. Meskell 2004, 164–65.

¹¹⁷ Robins 1999, 67; 1996.

¹¹⁸ Abdalla 2009; Dinarès Solà 2007. Cf. Manniche 1987, 110; Omlin 1973, 45, D.1.4.

¹¹⁹ Text 4 in Brawanski and Fischer-Elfert 2012, 72–73.

¹²⁰ Text 6 in Brawanski and Fischer-Elfert 2012, 73–74.

¹²¹ Brawanski and Fischer-Elfert 2012, 80–81.

the clinging/falling baby, the overturned chair, and the fact that she is lying on her back while the man is holding her head and stroking her forehead, it may actually be argued that it is the woman who has lost self-control. I see no reason why the Turin papyrus may not also be read as a lesson for the female ego, about how a woman should/not behave. It may even be read as a reminder about what is/not or potentially could be.

Conclusions

The Turin papyrus, and those other figured papyri and ostraca considered here, first and foremost tell us something about historical bodies and ontological boundaries in motion. Their significance (and power) lies in their differential relationship with each other, more traditional representations, concerns with what was and what potentially could be in everyday life and beyond. These papyri and ostraca were not simply made to be tossed away, stored, and forgotten. They were also copied and appropriated, viewed and translated, over and over, from one generation to the next, from past to present. It seems beyond doubt that the figured papyri and ostraca, and especially those motifs that were repeated over and over, deal with matters that the Egyptians/artists were concerned with. They are ways of processing knowledge, and offer space for communication, entertainment (possibly with a pinch of humour), as well as reflection (interpretation, critique and categorize).

The specific motifs discussed here, display a freedom of hand and spirit that is seldom seen elsewhere. Their multiple interpretations arguably reinforce the complexity and flexibility of boundaries between historical bodies, and the futility of attempts at absolute categorizations. No interpretation should therefore be ruled out, but attempts to negotiate the relation between human and non-human (animals and gods), men and women,

everyday life and extraordinary festivals, procreation and creation seem more plausible, indeed, closer to the daily life-world of the ancient Egyptians. This study illustrates that what was considered appropriate ways of representing bodies was, and still is, in a constant state of flux, ebbing and flowing, among other things as a result of anxieties towards actual or strictly hypothetical transgressions. The understanding of the papyrus within modern Egyptology, from Champollion onwards, is a case in point. The figured papyri and ostraca are above all components in multiple overlapping assemblages that, in relations with their affective environments, make up the complex (re)making of particular body worlds. The scenes on the Turin papyrus should not only be understood as the product of a playful imagination, their manufacture may actually be read as an open-ended action that enabled the possibility of rendering explicit what could otherwise not be shown/only be implicit, making room for multiple ontologies and alternative body worlds. As I see it, the different interpretations are not just possibilities, they are active players in the process towards understanding how this papyrus, and its possible contexts in the past, emerge and multiply in the present.

Acknowledgements

This research was funded by an international mobility grant from the Research Council of Norway (project no. 300470), hosted by the Centre for Gender Research at the University of Oslo, in collaboration with the Art History Department at Emory University. I would like to thank the editors and reviewers, as well as Susanne Töpfer for providing knowledge about the conservation of the Turin papyrus, Emily Whitehead, Marissa Stevens, and Jennifer Babcock for stimulating conversations about interpretations and potential parallels, and Rune Nyord for his generous feedback on the many earlier drafts of this text.

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18. Changing Gender Ideologies in Early Iron Age Athens

Theoretical considerations of gender relations have advanced considerably since the 1970s but the need to pay close attention to change and variability in past societies' construction of gender roles remains a consistent concern.¹ A recent increase in scholarly interest in the archaeology and history of Early Iron Age Athens has afforded us a much better, albeit still in many ways inadequate, understanding of the social developments in this crucial period of the city's formation. Several of these recent studies touch upon gender constructions and especially how these found their material expression in the city's mortuary record.

In this chapter, I explore the possibility of reconstructing two fundamentally different ideological conceptions of women's social status in Early Iron Age Athens (c. 1050–700 BC) with an emphasis on changing marriage arrangements. By highlighting insightful arguments already put forward by others and bringing together somewhat disparate evidence, I will suggest that both literary and archaeological evidence indicate a historical reconstruction in which women were ideologically regarded as somewhat equal to men during much of the Early Iron Age, whereas the construction of the chaste maiden (the *parthenos*) and patriarchal control began to be imposed in the second half of the eighth century BC. As such, these two historical periods represent two different belief systems about women's role and status in Athenian society. Although this proposed ideological shift undoubtedly did not occur overnight, I argue that the

late eighth century BC marked a period of significant change in gender ideologies.

Social reconstructions of the Early Iron Age in Greece depend to a large degree on the literary testimony provided by Homer's epic poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, and there exists already a fair amount of scholarly work on gender roles in early Greek literary works.² Even so, basing historical reconstructions of gender relations solely on written sources carries with it its own set of methodological and epistemological problems.³ Therefore, my approach consists of considering the written sources and the archaeological material as what one might call cross-contextual analogies and in so doing I will attempt to ground reconstructions of gender relations based on the written testimonies in the archaeological material.⁴ Therefore, this text inevitably enters into the problematic issue of the historicity of 'Homeric society'.⁵

It is by now generally agreed that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were composed in the second half of the eighth century BC and that the *Iliad* is earlier than the *Odyssey*.⁶

¹ For an overview, see Spencer-Wood 2006.

² For instance, Cohen 1995; Morris 1999; Langdon 2008; Franco 2012; Canevaro 2018.

³ See, for instance, Morris 1999; Raaflaub 2005.

⁴ On this for early Greece, see already Morris 1999.

⁵ For issues of the historicity of Homer, see overviews in e.g., Ulf 1990; Sheratt 1990: 2005; Raaflaub 2005, all with further references. See also many of the contributions to the four edited volumes: Andersen and Dickie 1995; Carter and Morris 1995; Sherratt and Bennet 2016; Pache and others 2020. Specifically for the historicity of women in the *Odyssey*, see Graham 1995 and Franco 2012.

⁶ For the dating, see e.g., Graham 1995 with further references. See also Altschuler and others 2013.

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Even though it is clear that the historical Early Iron Age, as revealed through archaeology, was not as culturally homogenous as the world described by Homer,⁷ it nevertheless seems clear that the epics mostly portray the Early Iron Age.⁸ However, Homer's poems cannot be trusted in every detail, of course, since historical elements from various periods were amalgamated, but it is arguably possible to identify, through archaeology, what Susan Sherrat calls 'material [...] correlates of elements of epic symbolism and ideology'.⁹ Indeed, Jan Paul Crielaard's review of elements in the epics and the material world of the eighth century BC led him to conclude that: 'the setting of the Homeric epics has intimate links with the contemporary world of the poet'.¹⁰ In essence, this is what I aim to do; to highlight textual and material correlates of gender ideologies in a diachronic perspective.

Gender ideologies are most often formed by complex social processes involving an intricate set of socio-cultural phenomena that are difficult to unravel. This certainly seems true also for Early Iron Age Athens, but the brevity of this text and the complexities of the topics addressed necessitate broad outlines, and I do not pretend that my arguments are in any way exhaustive. Even so, I hope my contribution will encourage further studies of the ways in which gender relations might help elucidate issues of broader socio-cultural organization in the past, as well as in this context provide an 'outsider's' input to the ongoing discussion of the gender relations in the historic past of Scandinavia, in particular in regard to the historicity of historical sources in the Scandinavian Viking Age.¹¹

The Burial Record of Early Iron Age Athens

Since funerary evidence is important for approaching gender ideologies, I begin by providing a brief overview of the burial record of the city. Approximately 550 graves are known from Early Iron Age Athens spanning from the Protogeometric period (c. 1050–900 BC, Early Geometric (c. 900–850 BC), Middle Geometric (c. 850–760 BC), and the Late Geometric period (c. 760–700 BC).¹² Early Iron Age graves have been found across most of the central part of the city. Until

the Late Geometric period, the majority of graves stem from smaller clusters of graves, whereas the burying groups in the Late Geometric period increasingly used communal necropoleis at the city's periphery.¹³ It is likely that the organizing principle of the burial plots in Athens, at least prior to the later eighth century BC, was to some extent based on kinship groups.¹⁴

Gender differentiation in the use of cremation urns is a noticeable pattern in the Athenian graves. During the ninth and eighth centuries BC, the cremated remains of males are correlated with neck-handled amphorae, whereas women are correlated with belly- and shoulder-handled amphorae.¹⁵ It is debated how strong this correlation was, but in the eleven instances from the Athenian agora where the biological sex of the deceased could be identified, four positively identified males were buried in neck-handled amphorae, and seven identified females were buried in belly- and shoulder-handled amphorae.¹⁶ A similar gendered pattern has been recognized in the metal depositions. During the ninth and eighth centuries BC, jewellery, dress pins, and fibulae are practically exclusive to female and child burials whereas iron weapons appear to be reserved for male burials. The distinction between female and male burials also extends to different grave markers where monumental amphorae were placed above female graves and monumental pedestalled kraters (used to mix wine and water) above male graves.¹⁷

Several past studies have already noted that Early Iron Age female burials were consistently 'richer' than their male counterparts.¹⁸ In his book *Style and Society in Dark Age Greece: The Changing Face of a Pre-literate Society, 1100–700 B.C.*, James Whitley calculated a 'wealth-score' to compare richer and poorer graves. The wealth-score was calculated by applying numerical values to different classes of objects such as ceramics, metals, and faience. These numerical values were then multiplied according to the size and the degree to which the objects had been worked.¹⁹ It can, of course, be debated how closely such calculations mirror emic values of the contemporary Athenian society, but the method at least provides us with a consistent way of diachronically quantifying

7 On this point, see esp. Franco 2012.

8 Morris 1986; Dickinson 1986; Crielaard 1995.

9 Sherrat 2006, 140.

10 Crielaard 1995, 274.

11 For a recent discussion, see Raffield and others 2017.

12 For comprehensive overviews, see e.g., Morris 1987; Alexandridou 2016; Papadopoulos and Smithson 2017; Dimitriadou 2019; Rönneberg 2021a; 2021b.

13 Rönneberg 2021b, esp. 152–54.

14 For kinship groups, see e.g., Whitley 1991, 64–67; Alexandridou 2016, esp. 353–55; Papadopoulos and Smithson 2017, 982–83; D'Onofrio 2021.

15 See e.g., Desborough 1952, 5–6; Whitley 1996, 221–22; 2003, 105; Papadopoulos and Smithson 2017, 645–46 and 667–70; Vlachou 2021, 162–63.

16 Papadopoulos and Smithson 2017, 667–70 with fig. 5.12.

17 For the monumental ceramic grave markers, see e.g., Coldstream 2011.

18 Whitley 1996, 220–21; Langdon 2005, 6–9.

19 Whitley 1991, 79–80.

changes in economic investments in funerals.²⁰ If we use the average wealth-score of the graves where the sex has been biologically determined, we get the wealth-distribution visualized in Figure 18.1.²¹ Although these quantifications only include about one-third (152 graves) of the total number of graves included in Whitley's analysis (468 graves), they show that the wealth gap between female and male burials steadily increased throughout the Early Iron Age until more than three times as much retrievable wealth was invested in female graves than in male graves towards the end of the Early Iron Age.²²

Elizabeth M. Brumfield has stated that: '[w]hen two or more contemporaneous burial programs exist in a single culture, they usually demarcate genders.'²³ The significant differences in the funerary arrangements in early Athens certainly indicate a gendered demarcation and in the rest of this text I will compare evidence from written sources with the burial record to further elucidate the two different gender ideologies as they might be reconstructed in the Early Iron Age Athenian society. I will argue that both written sources and the archaeological material correlate to such a degree that it is possible to identify two broadly defined social ideologies regarding women's status. The first ideology is situated within the kin-based society of 'Homeric society' where women were afforded important roles in the households. The second ideology refers to the construction of 'the maiden' in the latter half of the eighth century BC and an increasing concern for societal control over women.

'Cattle-Fetching Women' and an Ideology of Equality

In an insightful analysis of gender ideologies as they are portrayed in early Greek poetry, Hans van Wees has revealed a 'Homeric society' where women were admired for their beauty, skills, and mind, because such qualities increase the status and wealth of the household (*oikos*).²⁴ Van Wees emphasizes three points: first, women served as means for heads of households to achieve status and accumulate wealth through marriage arrangements. Second, women's production of textiles formed an important part of an exchange economy that



Figure 18.1. Chronological distribution of the wealth-score of male and female burials in Athens. Based on Whitley 1991.

added to the status of the household. Third, women took part in the management of the household on an equal footing with men.

In the upper echelon of 'Homeric society', maidens could significantly increase the wealth of households because marriage arrangements involved elaborate competitive courting gifts by suitors with ensuing payment of bride-gifts to the bride's household. Such gifts included, but were not limited to, objects of precious metals and large flocks of livestock. The maidens who are depicted in the iconographic scene on the shield of Achilles as described in Book 18 of the *Iliad* are portrayed as παρθένοι ἀλφεσίβοιαι ὠρχεῦντ' (maidens of the price of many cattle).²⁵ In the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* dancing maidens are described as παρθένοι ἀλφεσίβοιαι (worth many cattle as bride-price).²⁶ Women were seen by men as prizes gained in competition with other men, which added to male social prestige, and Van Wees stresses how such open male competition for coveted women and the exchange of marriage gifts are characteristic of pre-state societies.²⁷

Clothing is a distinctive attribute of the Homeric elite. Van Wees points to the limited variability in Homeric outfits and underlines that quality of clothing was primarily defined by the skill of the craftsmanship and the patterns of intricately woven designs. The production of textile was the domain of women, and as pointed out by van Wees in all cases where elaborate *peploi* (body-length women's attire) are mentioned in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the names of the women who produced them are mentioned. Significantly, elite women

20 As Whitley (1991, 111) acknowledges, this method does not consider perishable materials or funerary meals, etc.

21 The numbers are based on Whitley's wealth-scores, which can be found in Whitley 1991, 106–09, 124–27, 172–75.

22 It must be stressed that the situation in Athens is unique for Early Iron Age Greece, see Whitley 1996.

23 Brumfield 2006, 39.

24 Van Wees 2005.

25 Hom., *Il.*, XVIII.593–94.

26 H. Hom., *Aphrodite*, 119.

27 Van Wees 2005, 9.

also used their textile productions as an independent means of engaging in gift exchange alongside male guest-friendship exchanges. In a sense, as emphasized by van Wees, the production of elaborate textiles 'afforded women a degree of independent control over the products of their own labour'.²⁸

Homer's epics also provide evidence for shared male and female custody and management of household property. This sentiment is perhaps best expressed in Odysseus's words to Nausikaa, when he tells her that: γὰρ τοῦ γε κρείσσον καὶ ἄρειον, ἢ ὅθ' ὁμοφρονέοντε νοήμασιν οἶκον ἔχῃτον ἀνὴρ ἡδὲ γυνή (for nothing is greater or better than this, than when a man and a woman keep house together sharing one heart and mind).²⁹ Women held the keys to the household's storeroom into which men could not enter without the assistance of women, not even to retrieve their weapons.³⁰ Odysseus's wife Penelope tellingly refers to κτήσιν ἐμήν, δμῳάς τε καὶ ὑπερεφές μέγα δῶμα (my possessions, my slaves, and my great, high-roofed house),³¹ implying a sense of shared property.

In general, van Wees reconstructs a 'Homeric society' where men and women were conceptually considered as equals in terms of contributing to the overall management of the household. Most importantly, women were not considered inferior to men regarding any mental or emotional dispositions, which is in clear contrast to later classical notion of women's emotional inferiority to men.³²

I will argue that van Wees's Homeric ideology of gender 'equality', as we may refer to it, finds a material expression in the rich female burials in Early Iron Age Athens. Not only were female burials consistently wealthier than male graves, as mentioned above, but in the Middle Geometric period there are some exceptionally rich female burials. Scholars have singled out two burials as perhaps the best and most lavishly furnished examples of rich female burials of the period: the so-called 'Rich Athenian Lady' in the later agora north of the acropolis and grave 41 in the Kerameikos necropolis.

The cremation burial known as the 'Rich Athenian Lady' is considered by most scholars to be the richest Early Iron Age grave in Athens.³³ In Whitley's wealth-score it receives a score of 318, more than four times the average for female burials of the period. It is located near the foot of the Areopagos hill in the north-western

corner of the later classical agora. Physical anthropologist Maria A. Liston has determined that the human remains in the cremation urn, a belly-handled amphora, belong to a woman thirty to thirty-five years of age as well as those of a thirty-two to thirty-six-week-old foetus.³⁴ Bones of the lamb, cattle, goat, and a calf from the funeral meal amount to more than 70 kg of meat, which could have provided a funerary meal for a substantial number of participants. The tomb included thirty-four pieces of fine ware pottery, twenty-nine pieces of Handmade Incised Ware, and a terracotta chest with five modelled granaries on top. Apart from the large amount of pottery, the tomb also contained exotic objects of intrinsic value such as metal pins and fibulae, gold jewellery, and an imported necklace of faience beads, probably of Syrian origin. Notable finds also included two ivory seal stamps. The partially disturbed Middle Geometric cremation grave no. 41 in the Kerameikos necropolis has a wealth-score of 132, almost twice the average for the period. The cremated remains were placed in a belly-handled amphora and the grave contained two *oinochoai* (jugs for wine), a bronze bowl, two iron dress pins wrapped in gold foil, three gold rings, ten fibulae, and an ivory seal stamp.³⁵

The character of these graves certainly indicates a high social standing for the deceased, and several scholars have argued that these women possessed some kind of economic and religious authority.³⁶ As pointed out by Michael Laughy, it is highly significant that terracotta models of granaries that date from the Middle Geometric to the early seventh century BC, such as the five granaries on the chest from the grave of the 'Rich Athenian Lady', are strongly correlated with rich female burials, and they have never been found in male graves.³⁷ They presumably express some form of landholding or agricultural wealth, but since they are exclusively associated with women, they must somehow also be a reflection of the women's status. Although the functions of the seal stamps are poorly understood in this period, as personal possessions, they indicate administrative authority over production or religious affairs.³⁸ A reflection of the importance of women's textile work might also be seen in the open worked terracotta *kalathoi* (imitations of wooden wool baskets) and the spindle whorls in female burials. Far from being represented in all, let alone the majority, of female burials, these two items become popular in rich

²⁸ Van Wees 2005, 13.

²⁹ Hom., *Od.*, vi.182–84.

³⁰ For instance, Hom., *Od.*, ii.344–80.

³¹ Hom., *Od.*, ixx.525–26.

³² On this point, see van Wees 1998.

³³ For a complete publication of the tomb, see Papadopoulos and Smithson 2017, 124–75 (tomb 15) with further references.

³⁴ Liston and Papadopoulos 2004.

³⁵ Kübler 1954: 235–36, taf. 46, 72, 159–61.

³⁶ Laughy 2010, 69–78.

³⁷ Laughy 2010, 70–73 with n. 276 for references to all known granaries.

³⁸ Langdon 2005, 9–12. For seal stamps in the Early Iron Age, see Krzyszkowska 2020.

Athenian female burials from the Middle Geometric period.³⁹

Although the examples, both written and archaeological, used as illustrations here concern the status of elite women and not the 'average' Athenian woman, there, nonetheless, appears to be a general ideological congruence, or ideological correlation, between the status of women as they are portrayed in Homer and what we can observe in the archaeological record of the Middle Geometric period and possibly also earlier. However, this conformity appears not to last into the Late Geometric period of the second half of the eighth century BC, when Homer's poems are supposed to have been composed. On the contrary, in the Late Geometric period, it becomes difficult to find an ideological correlation between the 'Homeric society' and the archaeological record, a break that is most clearly articulated in the social constructions of maidens and marriage arrangements.

Changing Marriage Arrangements and the Ideological Construction of Maidenhood

Van Wees's study of the gender ideology in early Greek literature, already discussed above, also reveals an important change in attitudes towards women in general during the seventh century BC, which is particularly discernible in regard to marriage arrangements, which had changed radically by the sixth century BC.⁴⁰ In this period, the sources show that marriage had come to be perceived as a means for fathers to form alliances with other aristocratic families, and the elaborate exchange of gifts and 'bride-price', so characteristic of 'Homeric society', had all but disappeared. Norms had changed, and fathers now paid substantial dowries to the groom. Van Wees draws attention, as an example of this practice, to Herodotus's account of the Tyrant of Sicyon Cleisthenes who around 570 BC established a competition among thirteen suitors for his daughter Agariste to see who was worthy of becoming his son-in-law.⁴¹ This serves as an example to show how the emphasis had shifted from a competition over the bride to a competition over the father-in-law. Male suitors, on the other hand, were now evaluated on new and entirely different qualities, first and foremost their family lineage, athletic prowess, as well as their pedagogical training. Van Wees aptly summarizes the

evidence this way: 'Later archaic and classical Greek families [...] arranged their marriages in such a way as to emphasize the generosity of the wife-givers, the obligation owed by the wife-takers, and the closeness of relations between all men concerned.'⁴² That this practice had also become the norm in early sixth-century BC Athens is highly likely since Solon the lawgiver, according to Plutarch,⁴³ introduced a sumptuary law that seems to have been designed to reduce the size of dowries, which suggests that large dowries had become a societal problem.

Such significant changes in gender ideology, as they can be observed in early Greek literature, may find a material correlation in comparable gender-related changes in the archaeological record in the second half of the eighth and early seventh centuries BC. These archaeologically observable changes are most clearly articulated in ceramic iconography and funerary arrangements of nubile women, or 'maiden burials' as Susan Langdon has defined them. In a series of studies, Susan Langdon has argued for the identification of two chronologically distinct sets of gender-specific grave-goods that she refers to as 'maiden kits'.⁴⁴ None of these 'maiden kits' have been found in graves of women older than around eighteen to twenty years of age.

Langdon identified twenty-seven graves (sixteen from Athens) containing the first and earliest 'maiden kit', which spans a long period from the Protogeometric to the Middle Geometric I period (i.e., c. 1000–800 BC).⁴⁵ The assemblage includes terracotta chests, terracotta doll figurines, terracotta models of boots, and metal spiral hair ornaments. Based on these objects' association with young women's transition from childhood to marriageable age, Langdon has argued that they specifically mark the graves of maidens. The dolls, the boots, and the spiral hair rings can all be associated with maiden dedications to goddesses in connection with marriage.⁴⁶ An epigram by an unknown author states that a girl named Timareta dedicated her dolls and other personal possessions to 'Artemis of the Lake' before her marriage.⁴⁷ The decoration on the terracotta dolls in the 'maiden kits' reinforces this interpretation. The dolls exhibit incised vertical lines on the front, which have been associated with 'maiden belts' that were dedicated to Artemis when adolescent women reached marriageable age as illustrated on a mid-fifth-century

39 Strömberg 1993, 95. Seal stamps have been found in four early graves in Athens, see Langdon 2005, 9 n. 36.

40 Van Wees 2005, 8–10.

41 The story is told in Herodotus, VI.126–30.

42 Van Wees 2005, 9.

43 Plut., *Solon*, 20.

44 Langdon 2005; 2008, 130–43.

45 Langdon 2008, 130–33, table 3.1, nos 1–27.

46 For pre-marital dedications in general, see Dillon 2003, 215–19.

For dedications of locks of hair by maidens, see Carson 1990, 152 with n. 35 and Lee 2015, 45 with n. 99.

47 *Anth. Gr.*, VI.280. See also the discussion in Reber 1991, 154–55.

BC red-figure lekythos from Syracuse where a young woman hands over her 'maiden belt' to the goddess.⁴⁸ Such belts are already mentioned in the *Odyssey* and Langdon draws parallels to the continuous use of string belts in European prehistory to denote that a girl has reached marriageable age.⁴⁹ That boots were somehow symbolically associated with young women's pre-nuptial identity is, for instance, suggested by a fifth-century BC grave assemblage now in the British Museum. The grave contained a pair of small terracotta boots and a figurine of a girl sitting on a terracotta throne. The presence of a miniature *lebes gamikos*, the traditional wedding vessels for Athenian women, was surely meant to indicate that the woman died unmarried, just as the figurine on the throne refers to the archetypal maiden daughter (Kore/Persephone) who was abducted by Hades to be his bride in the underworld. Additionally, in a fourth-century BC marble relief from Lamia, we see a young woman presenting a baby to the goddess Artemis inside her temple.⁵⁰ On the temple wall hang several pieces of clothing and a pair of low boots or shoes that must have been dedicated to the goddess. The spiral hair ornaments are particularly indicative of a maiden identity since eleven of the fifteen known graves with such ornaments in Athens have been determined based on physical anthropological studies to belong to young women.⁵¹ These were likely used to wrap locks of hair around, which later written sources inform us were dedicated in sanctuaries by young women before marriage.⁵²

These specific 'maiden kits' reveal a particular socially constructed gendered awareness of maidens during much of the Early Iron Age, such as the other gender-specific funerary arrangements mentioned previously. This awareness was to continue throughout antiquity and beyond, but as Langdon has shown, the conception of the maiden changed radically around the middle of the eighth century BC when the character of the 'maiden kits' changed with the introduction of Langdon's second 'maiden kit'. In this second phase, the terracotta dolls, model boots, and chests, that featured so prominently earlier, disappeared entirely. The new 'kit' was now composed of metal hair spirals, ceramic wool baskets (*kalathoi*), terracotta pomegranates, and bands or diadems of gold foil that were previously found in male graves.⁵³ Even more significant than the change in

the composition of the grave assemblage is the fact that the 'maiden graves' now constitute the 'richest' female burials in the city, which in view of the general decline of wealth in this period (cf. Fig. 18.1) emphasizes the status that maiden graves were afforded at this time.

Around the same time as these changes in the maiden graves occurred, iconographic depictions of women, especially in ceramic iconography, changed significantly, which Langdon also correlates with a new construction of the maiden.⁵⁴ Before this time, women were practically exclusively depicted as mourners at funerals, but in the second half of the eighth century BC, maidens came to be depicted in a new convention that, in Langdon's words, emphasized 'female sexuality and its social constraints and a natural setting that embodies the liminality of her premarital condition'.⁵⁵ Significantly, maidens were now often depicted engaged in ritual choral dances, where their loose hair, 'maiden-belts', and the branches they often hold in their hands identify them as maidens.⁵⁶ Later written and iconographical evidence informs us that women's hairstyles were subjected to social control as girls grew into womanhood.⁵⁷ In Homer, a particular type of hair-binder (*krēdemnon*) marks a married woman, and Gregory Nagy sees a clear symbolic link between women's hair-binders and social control of their sexuality.⁵⁸ Beginning with the poet Alcman from the late seventh century BC, we have preserved fragments of a particular lyric genre of choral songs performed by maidens, the so-called *partheneia*,⁵⁹ and in Pindar's *Daphnephoricon* a maiden singer speaks of ζωσαμένα τε πέπλον ὠκέως χερσίν τ' ἐν μαλακαῖσιν ὄρπακ' ἀγλαὸν δάφνας (girding up my peplos and carrying a branch of laurel in my tender hands).⁶⁰ The girding up of the peplos is a clear reference to 'maiden belts'. Matteo D'Acunto, who most recently studied ritual dance scenes on early Attic pottery, has shown how the iconographic representations of maiden's choral performances in the period c. 720–675 BC in particular can be tied to an institutionalization of adolescents, and hence a new social construction of 'the maiden'.⁶¹

Alongside the dance scenes, another iconographical element enters the figurative arts, that of 'abduction' scenes, where men are seen clasping the wrist of women (the so-called *cheir epi karpō* — hand-on-wrist

48 Museo Archeologico Regionale Paolo Orsi, Syracuse, inv. no. 21186. See also Lee 2015, 103, fig. 4.7.

49 See Hom., *Od.*, XI.245. Langdon 2007, 186; 2008, esp. 151–52. For the string belt in Europe, see Barber 1994, 59–66.

50 The so-called Echinus relief, see e.g., Dillon 2004, 231–33, fig. 7.4.

51 Langdon 2008, 131.

52 See Dillon 2003, 215–16 with further references.

53 Langdon 2008, 139.

54 Langdon 2008, 143–96.

55 Langdon 2008, 144.

56 For ritual dance scenes on Attic pottery, see most recently D'Acunto 2016.

57 Lee 2015, 69–76.

58 Nagy 2013, 82–83. See also Carson 1990, 160–61 and Langdon 2008, 149.

59 Kousoulini 2022; Klinck 2001.

60 Pind., *Fr.*, 94b.6–8.

61 D'Acunto 2016, esp. 225–29.

— gesture). In such scenes, men are seen clasping the wrists of maidens, and sometimes leading them away as seen on the well-known ship-scene on a krater in the British Museum.⁶² This gesture is already mentioned in the description of the dances on the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad* where adolescent boys grasp the wrists of adolescent girls, and it makes its first appearance on the Attic pottery (significantly on shapes associated with women) from around the last quarter of the eighth century BC.⁶³ The gesture clearly prefigures later iconographical depictions of the wrist-clasp in marriage scenes of the Archaic and Classical periods and undoubtedly signals women's submissive role and men's control and authority over brides.⁶⁴

The changes in arrangements and status that were afforded the maiden burials and maidens' sudden proliferation in the Athenian iconographical repertoire indicate a meaningful transformation in the social conceptualization of maidenhood. Langdon takes this change to mark the beginning of the social construction of the chaste virgin (the *parthenos*) that was to become a characteristic trait of a later patriarchal Greek society. Guilia Sissi, who analysed the meaning of the social notion of *parthenia* (maidenhood/virginity) has shown that the concept was tied to a social norm intended to regulate both married and unmarried women's sexual life.⁶⁵ Pre- and extramarital sex was simply not tolerated in ancient Greek society because, in Sissi's words, such sexual activity 'violate[d] the regulated pathways of legitimate reproduction.'⁶⁶ The violation consists of a breach of the father of the household's authority, especially his authority to form marriage alliances with other aristocratic families by marrying off his daughters to suitable families. According to Plutarch, Solon, the Athenian lawgiver, introduced in the early sixth century BC the law that fathers could legally sell their daughter(s) into slavery if she were no longer a *parthenos*.⁶⁷ This legally sanctioned violation underlines the magnitude of the cultural norm. For Langdon, the changes that happened in the second half of the eighth century BC mark the point at which '[v]irginity burdened with family honour and gendered shame makes its entrance into Greek culture through these visual associations.'⁶⁸

Returning to van Wees's outline of the changes in marriage arrangements discussed above, it appears



Figure 18.2. Attic *deinos* stand with betrothal(?) scene. © State Collection of Antiquities and Glyptothek Munich, photograph by Renate Kühling. Inv. no. 8936.

highly likely that these changes in marriage arrangements are related to the social construction of the *parthenos*. As marriage arrangements gradually became a way for men to form alliances between households, the concept of *parthenia* was a new way to distinguish and mark the qualities of daughters in the prospect of future hypergamic relations. Perhaps the best evidence to suggest that this shift in marriage arrangements had already occurred in the second half of the eighth century, and therefore synchronously with the changes in the 'maiden graves', is a scene from a ceramic stand for a mixing bowl (*deinos*) made in Athens around 700 BC, which shows an iconographic scene that can be interpreted as a betrothal scene (Fig. 18.2). Two men stand in front of a tall sceptre with swords in their hands. These men are obviously to be understood as members of the elite evidenced by their swords and the sceptre.⁶⁹ Sceptres were important for the taking

62 British Museum, London, inv. no. 1899,0219.1.

63 Hom., *Il.*, XVIII.590–606. For this iconographical motif, see e.g., Langdon 2006; 2008, 197–233; D'Acunzio 2016, 211–17.

64 Jenkins 1983.

65 Sissi 1990.

66 Sissi 1990, 346.

67 Plut., *Solon*, 23.

68 Langdon 2008, 196.

69 See e.g., Combeflack 1948.

of oaths, and it is very likely that the two men are heads of households arranging a marriage between their respective son and daughter. Behind the man to the left stands a maiden, who can be identified by her maiden's belt, which is clearly indicated by the strings hanging from her waist, which appear very similar to the incised decoration on the terracotta dolls from the previous 'maiden kit'. In her right hand, she holds a branch, which, as discussed above, is another sign of her nubile and liminal status.⁷⁰

Sanne Houby-Nielsen has shown how there was a shift in the ideology of representations in the funerary sphere in early seventh-century BC Athens.⁷¹ Emphasis was now placed on the leading male heads of households who manifested themselves through references to their social qualities, which included references to rich Homeric-style banquettes. At the same time, women and children were no longer afforded significant burials, which is also reflected in the predominance of male iconography on grave stelai throughout the seventh century BC. Judging from the funerary evidence it would, therefore, seem that already in the early seventh century BC there was no need for social display of maidens, nor indeed any women, at funerals, which suggests that the ideological shift had become firmly established by this time.

Concluding Remarks

I have attempted to show that the material evidence from Early Iron Age Athens can, to some extent, be correlated with two fundamentally different ideological constructions of women as they can be reconstructed from the written sources. In 'Homeric society' marriage arrangements reflect social conventions concerning status and honour based on the principle of reciprocity. Men, and to a lesser extent also women, achieved status primarily through their ability to reciprocate, households gained status and wealth through marriages, and men gained status by being able to win in the competitive 'bidding' for women. During the second half of the eighth century BC, a new marriage ideology emerged where maidens' purity and the wealth and social status of the father-in-law were paramount. Marrying into families of higher status and wealth now became the dominant structuring principle, at least among the wealthier segments of society. The concept of 'the maiden' (*parthenos*) is paramount in this development. Although fidelity is a recurrent theme in Homer's epics, not least Penelope's fidelity to her husband Odysseus, it is hard

to interpret the poems as reflecting a fully patriarchal society. In his interpretation of female representations in the *Odyssey*, Seth L. Schein concluded that: '[i]t would be simplistic to adopt the standard, patriarchal reading of Penelope and of the roles of women and other females in the *Odyssey* generally without recognizing how the poem partly undoes this reading.'⁷² This corresponds well with van Wees's study of the Homeric ideology of women's status in Homer's poems.

At the same time, the fundamental changes regarding maidens in the archaeological material (i.e., the new 'maiden kit', the fact that the maidens' graves are now the richest burials, the proliferation of maidens in iconography, and the 'abduction' scenes) strongly indicate the social convention based on the gendered concept of *partheneia* had already been introduced at the same time Homer's epics were composed. Therefore, if my reconstruction holds any merit, it points to a discrepancy in the gendered ideology as they are portrayed in the Homeric epic, and the everyday experience of women in Athenian society. This raises, I think, important questions about the reception of Homer's epic and the Athenian audience. How would Athenian men and women react to experiencing a rather homogenous relationship between men and women and a completely different set of cultural norms for marriage arrangements, if Athenian society of the second half of the eighth century BC could already be defined as guided by a patriarchal ideology? I suspect there is no easy answer to this question, and the change must certainly not have been so abrupt as the preceding discussion might suggest. Indeed, as Marc Weinsanto has established, there appears to have been a development in social attitudes towards marriage arrangements in the period between the composition of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*.⁷³ In the *Odyssey*, proper marital status, in contrast to concubinage, becomes more important and there is now an emphasis on legitimate children in contrast to children born out of marriage, an emphasis which is not found in the *Iliad*. Such indications of change in the time frame between the composition of the two poems align well with a historical reconstruction that sees the later part of the eighth century BC in Athens as a period of transformation of gender constructions.

Nonetheless, the chronological discrepancy in gender ideology between the written sources and the archaeological material also raises an important methodological issue. This case study reiterates the importance of integrating written and archaeological sources into historical reconstructions, and in particular the importance of grounding historical gender studies in material culture.

70 For this interpretation see Langdon 2008, 234–44.

71 Houby-Nielsen 1995.

72 Schein 1995, 25.

73 Weinsanto 1983.

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